

2014-2015

MEDASUR

Measure Editorial Board 2014-2015

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Measure is the creative arts magazine of Saint Joseph's College and contains the work of Saint Joseph's College students, faculty, staff, and alumni.

Fall

Katie Davisson

Isn't it funny
that the season we find most beautiful
requires the trees to lose their leaves?
Essentially, they're dying, but
we think it's the most magnificent thing.
They turn to bright reds
and warm yellows. And fall to the
ground gracefully, just to be trampled by
the people walking past.
Then winter comes, and
they have nothing left to hide behind,
for their once green-covered branches
now stand bare against the world.

You took my leaves, leaving me
standing naked in this coming winter.
You said your arms would take their
place and I could use you to stay warm.
And just like the leaves that fall to the ground
I have to be a figure of grace,
never falling apart. Even as the world
walks over me with their rugged-soled boots.
And like fall, I will find something beautiful
even among the heartache of death.

The ‘Right’ Words

Kylie Hill

I’m broken and you’re broken.
I shattered us with only a few words:
The wrong words.
How can I put the pieces together?

My face feels like jelly
And my stomach burns.
Hands clammy, arms vibrating,
I am alone.
Why can’t I find the words?
My mouth opens, and then,
I am too late.

I say the wrong thing,
Do the wrong thing,
And then everything is broken.
When will I learn the ‘right’ words
To put us back together?

October

Rochelle Robertson

I wrote this poem
on dad's big tan paper;
the kind he used for the old printer,
the kind we used to crayon.
It was a summer project
left for autumn
after he was gone.
Not enough time.
Never enough time
to go to the beach
and mow the lawn.
I'd made a choice.
"You reap what you sow," he'd say...
I, with my tan
standing in emergency...
Mowing the lawn that day
without my help
had been his last sacrificial act...
October;
two months.
Time to write about Mercury:
one side perpetually cold
like the side
that isn't us laughing.
Time taken this autumn day
among the colors;
time stolen
from another era
in the lawn
at home.
One orange tomato still hanging
in his unintended garden:
my favorite taste

my favorite color.
Thanks, dad.
As many memories as leaves
Scattered, random, everywhere—
a thousand stories
a hundred thousand scars.
Out of the lawn
into the cold house
to brew the coffee with Irish cream,
our favorite.
Then to his desk
where the sun was shining
on the calendar
immemorial, forever July 20,
the day he died.
During mercury retrograde
it all came back around:
the love found
and lost.
Once we were in a season unchanged, immortal:
in the dream car, on the tennis court,
delivering newspapers in a blizzard,
enduring Christmas.
A golden brown bug interrupted;
landed on the big paper
next to where I was penciling.
A heart shaped cloud
in the sky...
He is not gone.
He can't be gone.
One bald dandelion;
he in the bathroom mirror
combing thin hairs over a spotty scalp.
Yellow rotten cucumbers in the rogue wind,
my back almost healed
where it all went in,
where it all came out.
The magnificent oaks

send down their spirits in the wind,
and piles of yesterdays
rise higher.
So let it come...the grief.
...On a Saturday afternoon
frosty back window
that snow day
London Bridges falling down;
game pieces in primary colors
hitting the floor
as dad's bent and swollen fingers
pushed them on the carpet.
Falling like us girls,
jumping onto and off of
red pillows in a pile.
Us girls, in and out of arms;
ages of hues:
emotions, our victories and failures.
Now we're old:
our souls, the house, the trees,
the squirrels chasing around
chewing the spongy chair to bits
with their gray manes prickled.
Weeds reach high
confused or hopeful?
Alone in paradise, she wrote, defeated
and this day
ingloriously alone
in the imperfect world
he left behind...
Beef stroganoff in the kitchen,
soda running from noses as we cackled,
a hall light
creak on the stairs
down to the kitchen
in his saggy light blue pajamas,
glasses half way down his nose;
a joke

he loved us
with mom gone.
Before the fall,
in the prime of life,
and now,
there is... gratefulness
where his Socratic questions once hung
like icicles
off a crooked gutter.
I can write invitations
to anyone who wants
to come to the wedding
regardless of how they dress.
So I write
with this unsharpened utensil
over nail polish chips,
fleas biting in the lawn,
wasps on the screen...
“Whooooah! That’s a big one!” he’d spray from a ladder
The letting go
is taking place.
Surely there will be love again
in this empty place;
an exchange of gentle wisdom
in a hammock
strung between two sturdy trees
on a lazy afternoon
where father and daughter
are much more
than ships
that passed
in the night.

Anthony Majewski, Alzheimer's



Spray Paint Collage 20 x 16in

Snuggles the Assassin Kitty: Agent 00Meow

Jimmy Kile

I opened the cage door and stuck my hand in. I pulled out my adorably cute kitten named Snuggles. He was Garfield orange with faint white streaks of fur on the tips of his ears, his paws, and around his mouth. All in all, he weighed about three pounds and fit into the palm of my hand.

But don't let his cuteness fool you: Snuggles is a vicious killing machine. He is single-handedly responsible for the death of hundreds of my personal enemies. Anyone who dares to cross me faces the wrath of Snuggles the Assassin Kitty: Agent 00Meow.

"I've got a very important mission for you, Snuggles. Are you ready?"

Snuggles gave a tiny meow in affirmation.

"Good. Here's the plan..." I laid it out for him as he sat in my palm and licked his tiny paw.

"Here's your equipment," I said as I pulled out a smallish attaché case. I pulled out a jet pack the size of a six ounce soda can and strapped it on him. Snuggles arched his back and purred as I put it on him.

"Stop that. You're a relentless assassin, not a lovable ball of fur," I said. He meowed up at me with googly eyes. He was pretty adorable actually.

"You ready?" I asked him. Another heartwarming meow. The jetpack fired up, and Snuggles began to hover above the ground.

"Oh wait," I said as he began to take off. He circled back to me and landed at my feet. "I forgot. Here's a targeting scope," I said as I attached a small helmet to his head. Man, did he look fierce. I flicked on the targeting laser and immediately regretted it. Snuggles shot off across the floor, chasing the red dot across the floor. He tried to pounce on it, but he ended up just landing sprawled on the carpet. He chased the laser pointer across the floor to the wall, where it went up onto the wall. Snuggles ran into the wall.

"Meow."

I bent down and took the helmet off as Snuggles stood up.

"On second thought, let's not use this yet," I said. Snuggles meowed an affirmative. He raised one of his front paws in a salute and flopped to the ground.

See what I mean? Vicious.

Never Going Home

Vivian Myers

Now that we officially lived in the brick house in Indiana, I was as rebellious as a measly, homeschooled six-year-old could be. I believed I was doing things that might upset my parents, but it truly was all in my mind. I was thoroughly upset and maybe slightly excited for the new, unforeseen life my parents had brought us to. I knew that my mother was not happy with the move, and I knew it was for similar reasons that I too was upset.

Our parents tried doing everything in their power to get us accustomed to the new life. We joined girl scouts, we went to a new Methodist church, and we attended dance and gymnastics classes. It was always hard for me and my sisters to connect and make friends with children our own age. We were home-schooled so we had very little opportunities to make friends.

We had attended church at Edwards United Methodist Church in Liberty a few times, and every morning I wanted to tell mom what I really thought. I liked the church and some of the people in it, but it was not the church in Frankfort. I missed the little old ladies that we sat with, I missed Carm, and I wanted my old house back.

We went into church that morning acting and behaving like miniature adults. We listened to the preacher, took part in communion, and my sisters and I went up for junior church. I sat in front of the preacher thinking that I was just like everyone else in the circle. My sisters and I did not stand out in the mass of children.

I led my sisters down to the craft time after junior church. All three of us were shy and didn't talk to anyone but each other. If an adult talked to us, we listened, nodded our heads, and continued with our previous actions. It wasn't that we didn't like talking to adults; we were very used to that. It was the fact that they were sickeningly sweet and happy. They tried talking to us, but we were annoyed with their behaviors. I knew it was because we were new to the church, but we just wanted them to forget we were there.

When the adults ushered us back to our parents, we smiled at our guides and stepped in line behind our mother. She spoke to the other adults about us and how helpful we were during craft time. When mom was done talking she helped us gather our crafts, picked Lillian up, and we followed her out to the van. Once we buckled our seat belts and mom was in the front seat she asked us how junior church and craft time went.

"I don't know. It was fine. They lady with the brown hair is really nice. She lets me call her glue fingers. I think the lady who sits beside us during service, her skin is brown, she is very nice."

I like her, she's very loud but also very happy." I had taken a liking to both women. They didn't try to force us to talk. We felt comfortable with them, so their questions and obnoxious behaviors were welcome.

"That's good. I like both ladies also. How do you like church?" Mom asked.

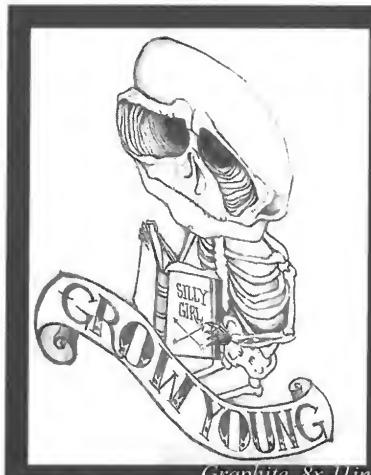
"I don't. I want to go back to our church. I like it better." I said. It was the first time I had said it out loud, and due to that, I said it so fast that I wasn't sure if I had said it at all. Mom didn't speak for a few minutes. She just looked at me through the rear view mirror as she drove. I tried not to look at her face at all because if I did I knew I was going to cry, and I didn't want that.

"I'm sorry Vivi."She said. I looked out the window and knew that we were never going back to my church, my home, in Frankfort, New York.



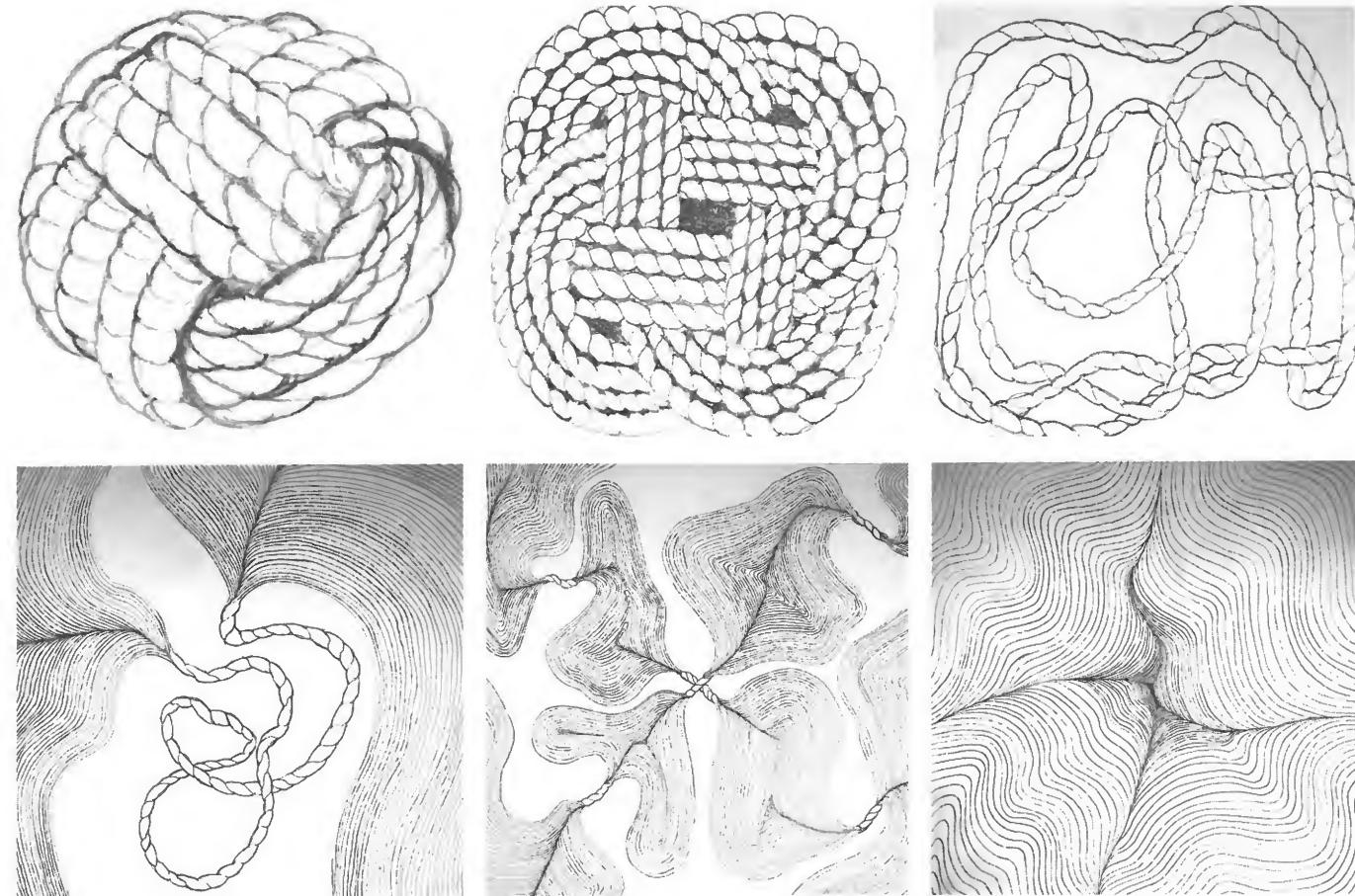
Nicole Thomsen, *The Bride*

Graphite, 8x 11in



Nicole Thomsen, *Grow Young Silly Girl*

Graphite, 8x 11in



Joe Haberlin,
*Conception to Birth: The
Emotional Journey of A
Soon to Be Father*
Pencil, 6 x 6 - 18 x 18in

Driftwood

Fr. Jim Bender, C.P.P.S

Murmuring on a lonely beach, about my feet the waters played, surrendered a piece of formless driftwood carved by wind and sun and wave.

Knots and bumps, wrinkles and blemishes, tortured contours and twisted veins, shadowed valleys and rounded ridges suddenly the Nazarene's Face became.

I am that weightless, hollowed driftwood, chiseled by blows, by battles worn, crooked of line and disjointed of figure, sculptured by the waters, sun-bathed and storm torn.

A kindly, playful, creative God is gathering my scars each into its place to sketch for himself a cherished portrait: of his own Son a human face.

As the Worm Turns

Mark R. Seely

Sitting at the bottom of the front porch steps on a bright and humid August afternoon, the street was quiet, but the air was filled to capacity with cricket chirp and dueling cicadas. Between my feet, a thin small worm flexed frantically against the rough and crumbly concrete less than a hand's width from the earthy crease separating the bottom step from the sidewalk. My first thought was that the worm had accidentally wandered too far from the moist safety of the crease and got lost in the superheated concrete desert marking the boundary of its world. In a short time it would be a tiny dirt-colored streak. "From earth to earth" applies to worms with a kind of immediacy that is lacking with fat bone-filled surface dwellers.

But something wasn't right. The worm was moving with too much energy, or the wrong kind of energy, or its contortions were too violent or at the wrong intervals to be heat-induced. I looked more closely and saw that its body was covered with small sandy bits of eroded sidewalk. I looked even closer and the reason for its panicked wriggling became clear: it was being molested by an ant so small that I had to squint to see it from a sitting position. Although there was no way to view its miniature mandibles in action, it was apparent from the worm's stutter-step wrenching motion that the ant was biting it on one side, and then running around to bite it on the other side before the worm could finish flexing in response to the first bite.

I watched in a mild state of fascinated horror as the attack continued for quite some time. Bite and recoil, left and right, over and over and over. Although the worm outweighed the ant by several orders of magnitude, it was clearly the underdog. I felt a strong inclination to reach down and move the worm to safety. For a brief moment I thought about killing the ant, as if there was some kind of moral imperative that I act in the worm's defense. Of course that's ridiculous. The universe operates on a morality that reaches far deeper than Western society's superficial just-world notions of fair play, a morality in which justice takes its ultimate form and was apportioned in equal parts to all beings at the beginning of time. The thought that I could act as an agent of cosmic righteousness is unadulterated arrogance, evidence of a mind that has been thoroughly colonized.

But it is informative to note that I chose to cast my lot with the worm instead of the ant.

Eventually, the ant got a lock-on hold of one end of the worm (from my vantage, I couldn't tell if it was the front or the back end), and what was a side-to-side flip-flop back-and-forth, became a linear struggle, with the ant tugging the worm further away from the crease at the bottom of the porch step, further into radiating sidewalk heat deadly to anything lacking a protective exoskeleton.

The worm would bunch itself up and stretch and bunch again, each time pulling the ant a few ant body-lengths, but the ant pulled back with a relentless persistence and won new ground with each bunch-stretch cycle.

The worm had somehow managed to get a small bit of traction at the edge of a thumbnail-deep pit in the concrete, when a teenage girl on a bicycle slightly too small for her came around the corner and across the street in my direction. She was pedaling all out and riding one handed with her other hand clutching a cell phone, her thumb furiously tapping at the screen. She was breathing strangely, and it was the unusual cadence and volume of her breath that pulled me away from the sidewalk micro-drama. Like the worm's too-frantic contortions, the girl's breathing begged for closer attention. Something wasn't right. It wasn't until she passed directly in front of me that I could see that she was crying violently and her face was smeared shiny with freely flowing tears.

A razor-edge glint of sunshine from the spinning bicycle wheels, an unexpected instant of total blindness followed by shimmering black afterimage, and the girl and the worm and the ant converged, forged by a flash of reflected sunlight into a single expression of pain. The worm's life-and-death contortions, the ant's burden of labor, the girl's adolescent social crisis—all struggle is local, all pain is experienced in the first person.

Scott Esch, *Untitled*



Charcoal, 18 x 24in

Potawatomie Park on the Iriquois River, Jasper County

John D. Groppe

Potawatomie once dwelt here,
hunted the high ground woodlands,
fished the wetlands and the creek
we call a river,
bent trees to mark a trail
to settlements and welcome,
their arrowheads still emerge
from the sandy soil after a rain.

They departed under armed guards
and an act of Congress to leave
a trail of tears from here to Kansas.

We wanted their forests,
even the great swamp,
for our cattle and corn
and the rivers for sport and trade.

We axed the forests, drained the swamp
after slaughtering the waterbirds for play,
secured our women, children, and creeds.

The bones of the Potawatomie
do not surface after a rain,
But we have named a park for them
And felt no guilt.

Fall: A Personification

Michael W. Steinhour

If Fall were a person

She would be cold and wind-blown.

Hair mussed, cheeks rosy, and a chilly nose perfect for small, warming kisses.

Fall would dress in vibrant shades of red and purple.

Yet she would respect her earth-tones as well.

Always the dapper dresser, she would have an outfit for every occasion.

When people saw her they would stop and stare, and comment on her.

But don't think Fall shallow or one-dimensional.

Her roots go deep, her thoughts ever deeper.

She tracks in leaves but she refuses to run the sweeper.

Her laughter is the rustling of leaves in a stiff breeze,

Her words are softly spoken although her voice may bring with it a storm.

Fall is a woman of transition, bridging the gap between the sweaty summer days and the snuggly winter nights.

As complex as RNA polymerase,

As simple as a smile and a firm handshake.

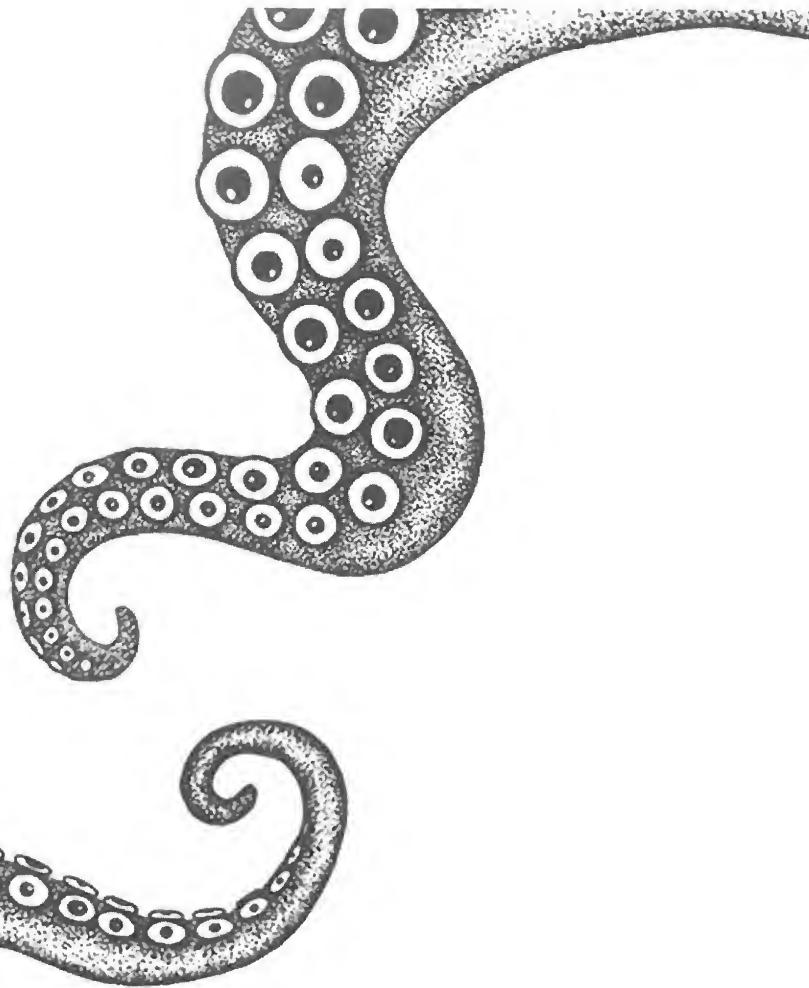
Why all the feminine traits you might ask.

No man possesses the range of personality, the depth and breadth of character, or the eerie grace to be as glorious as Fall.

Mischief

Michael Nichols

I can't write haikus.
"What am I reading?" you ask.
I will never tell.



Thoughts before a Core Lecture

Michael Nichols

Fields of eyes, aglow
From light alien to sun.
To bloom with these words?

Her Colors

Kylie Hill

I wear her colors,
Not necessarily out of pride,
Or loyalty, or reverence,
Or even love.

But I wear them out of hope.
Hope for the future,
That nothing will stand in the way.
Hope for the present,
That today is better than yesterday.
And hope for the past,
That it stays in the past
So no more harm comes her way.

Blue, Red, White, Yellow.
Each a symbol,
Not to remember the pain,
But to remember the strength.
Her colors give me hope.



Amanda Duncan, Tentacle Series
Black Ink, 12 x 8in each

The Hole: A Children's Story

Mark R. Seely

One day a small group of people got together and decided that digging a hole in the ground would be an interesting way to pass the time. There was no reason to choose digging a hole over any other activity, say, building a treehouse or carving pornographic images on rocks. Digging a hole just happened to be what seemed fitting to this particular group of people on this particular day. After they had been digging a while, other folks came around and joined in the fun, and pretty soon there was a substantial hole in the ground, large enough for several people to be digging at once.

And the hole got deeper and deeper.

It didn't take long before the hole got so deep that it was hard for people to climb in and out, and some of the folks stopped digging and said "Well, that's obviously as far as we can go." But then someone came up with a clever idea. By tying two lengths of rope together at regular intervals it was possible to make a ladder that could be anchored to a rock on the surface and allow people to climb easily in and out of the hole, and the people continued to dig.

And the hole got deeper and deeper.

Soon the hole was so deep that it was impossible to toss any more dirt out without it falling back in. At this point most of the folks stopped digging and said "Well, that's obviously as far as we can go." But then someone came up with a clever idea. By tying a basket to a length of rope, people on the surface could drop the basket into the hole, people in the hole could fill the basket with dirt, and the people on the surface could pull the basket up, empty it, and then send it back down for another load, and the people started digging once more.

And the hole got deeper and deeper.

The hole got so deep that it became hard for the people digging at the bottom to see what they were doing, and so they stopped digging, and said, "Well, that's obviously as far as we can go." But then, someone came up with a clever idea. By rolling beeswax around a string, they made a device that could be burned to provide light sufficient to dig by, and the people started digging once more, by candlelight.

And the hole got deeper and deeper.

After a while, the people digging at the bottom of the hole and the people pulling baskets of dirt to the surface got too tired to continue, and so they stopped digging and pulling, and said, "Well that's obviously as far as we can go." But then someone came up with a clever idea. By this point the hole had attracted a lot of attention, and several people were just standing around watching. Some of the spectators could take the place of the diggers and pullers. And when they got tired, other spectators could take over. A few of the spectators were persuaded to climb into the hole and dig, and a few others were convinced to pull and empty baskets of dirt.

And the hole got deeper and deeper.

Days passed, and the excavation project became the only subject of conversation. "How deep is it today?" they asked each other. "How deep do you think it can go?" Soon everyone was involved. Everyone was expected to spend part of their day digging and part of their day pulling. Those who were too feeble to dig or pull were expected to make candles or weave rope and baskets.

And the hole got deeper and deeper.

Then one day, tragedy struck. A torrent of water from a surprise rainstorm collapsed part of the hole and buried a group of diggers, killing them all. After the bodies were retrieved, family members of the dead diggers grieved and lamented, "Well, that's obviously as far as we can go." But then someone came up with a clever idea. Dying as a digger was a truly praiseworthy end. Such a sacrifice simply cannot go unrewarded. Surely there is an inestimable reward in the afterlife for diggers who meet such a fate. And the people agreed. And a shrine was built in their honor.

And the hole got deeper and deeper.

More days passed, and the hole became so deep that the air at the bottom was hot and hard to breathe, and even a few hours of digging became difficult to endure. And the pullers had to pull so long to raise a basket that their hands became blistered and sore. And they stopped digging and pulling and said, "Well, that's obviously as far as we can go." But then someone came up with a clever idea. A person who refuses to dig or pull of their own accord can be made to dig or pull if their survival depends on it. And so the community elders made it a law that an able bodied person could not have access to food or shelter or partake in any pleasurable community activities until they spent the expected amount of time digging and pulling. Those who were not so able bodied were still required to make candles and weave rope and baskets, but now according to law they could not eat until they met their candle or basket quota.

And the hole got deeper and deeper.

Then one day, a group of pullers decided that they had had enough, dropped their ropes, and left the town for the forest where they could hunt and collect their own food and live life in peace without having to work on the stupid hole. Soon several diggers, candle makers, and weavers joined them. And a few of the community elders said, "Well, that's obviously as far as we can go." But then someone came up with a clever idea. Since the people who fled to the forest broke the law, they have forfeited their rights to equal consideration in the community. A posse was formed and the defectors in the forest were rounded up, fitted with shackles, and forced to work on the hole at the end of a whip.

And the hole got deeper and deeper.

But the shackles and whippings made the workers clumsy and inefficient. Work on the hole began to slow to a crawl. Some in the community became uncomfortable with the cruel treatment of the workers and others started to question why there needed to be a hole in the first place. For a brief time, it looked like the entire hole-digging enterprise would collapse. But then someone came up with a clever idea. Children could be taught from an early age that hole-diggers were heroes, that working on the hole was the most noble and respected occupation, and that the hole itself was the physical embodiment of human greatness. What they learn as children will carry forward as adults, and shackles or whips will rarely be needed because the idea of doing something other than working on the hole will be unthinkable for most people, and anyone who refused to devote his or her life to the hole will become a pariah and considered an abomination. So a program of compulsory education was developed and implemented, and the children grew up with internalized whips and shackles and eagerly joined the ranks of diggers, pullers, candle makers, and weavers.

And the hole got deeper and deeper.

Amanda Duncan, *Tribal Owl*



Graphite, 20 x 10in

Pitiful Princess

Gloria Leonard

You call me “princess,”
Not a term of endearment from your lips.
Demeaning and patronizing at best,
As if I’m a spoiled brat.
You talk down to me,
Telling me I can’t have everything I want.
As if I always get my way,
Like I’ve never been told, “No.”
You act as if you’ve given me the world,
But you always show up empty-handed.
Shame on me. Shame. On. Me.
A princess should know better.
I ask for little,
But even that is too much.
I throw a fit and stomp my feet,
And tears begin to fill my eyes.
I guess I’m bratty and needy and selfish,
Although I’ve only asked for you.

Spelling Bee

Gloria Leonard

Running my fingertips over the scar tissue
On my left thigh
Takes me back to the fifth grade.
I am trying out for the spelling bee.
Eagerly, I wait for the next word.
Conceited.
Conceited. Conceited, conceited, conceit—.
C-O-N-C-I-E-T-E-D.
And I’m walking out of that fifth grade classroom
And into this cold bathroom.
Senior year is nothing like they said it’d be.
As I sit on the sterile bed hooked up to a machine,
Tears run down my face, but I start to laugh.
I remember that stupid rule—
“I before E except after C,”
An engraved reminder of what it’s like
To put you before me.

I've Kissed Those Lips

Gloria Leonard

I can't look at you because all I
can think is,
“I've kissed those lips.”
I've tasted your skin.
Salty, after a workout.
Fresh, after your shower.
But I steal sideways glances and
I remember
The way your jaw line felt
cupped in my hands
And I kissed you, like you were
air and I couldn't breathe.
I miss you.
I can't breathe because I miss
you.
But the world spun before you
turned it upside-down
And it'll spin again,
As soon as I can forget your kiss.
But I've kissed those lips.

You Are

Gloria Leonard

You are every cliché,
Every mushy gushy feeling
I've tried to stuff into the bottom
Of my gut—
But that's where the butterflies start.
And I can't ignore that unsteady drumming
In the jail cell I call a rib cage
As my heartspeedsupbut then s l o w s d o w n .

You are beautiful.
You have golden brown tousled hair,
The kind fingers lock into
As kissing becomes instinct
Like breathing—
But I still can't catch my breath.
And I can't fathom your existence
In a place that is not written word or song
As our world spins on but the hands on the clock still.

“Where were you last night?”

Christina O’Connell

“Where were you last night?” I asked Dad as he poured out his morning coffee into his blue NASCAR mug. He had major bed head, and his eyes were blood shot. Dad closed his eyes, set the mug down and put his hand to his face. There was no answer, which usually meant he was at the casino again. “What time did you get home?” I asked, annoyed at his avoidance. He moved to the medicine cabinet and grabbed some Tylenol, washing the white pill down with coffee. “I didn’t hear you come home,” I said, hoping to hear his explanation.

“Seriously, do you have to have the music blaring this early?” he snapped. I glanced at the clock on the stove and it read two o’clock in the afternoon in green neon. I walked over to my iPod and waited a few minutes, listening to Janis Joplin’s gritty, raspy voice. I listened to the last few notes of “Summertime” and pressed the stop button. “Roll down the blinds too. I can’t see with that sun blinding me,” Dad says, shading his eyes. I walked over to the large windows by the back door and rolled the blinds half way, seeing that the sunshine wasn’t too bright.

“Were you at the casino again last night, Dad? Or should I say this morning?” I said, staring out the window. “Please, don’t make any more excuses.”

“So what if I was? It’s none of your concern,” he said, not appreciating the accusing tone of my voice.

“How could you say that? This is beginning to turn into a problem.”

“Meaning?” he said, taking a long sip of his coffee.

“It’s becoming an addiction,” I said, turning around and putting my hands on my hips. “How much did you lose this time?” I asked him with sudden nerves rushing through me.

“I’m not an addict and it’s none of your business in the first place,” Dad says, pointing his mug in my direction.

“That’s not fair! I just worry about you. I cry. You come home later and later and give that place every last penny.”

“It’s my money. I work hard. And I’m certainly not an addict,” Dad said, finishing his last drop of coffee. I breathed in deeply and looked down at my feet, thinking that these conversations seem to get worse each time. “I’m not an addict,” he repeated with more urgency.

“Denial’s the first sign,” I muttered. “You don’t know when to quit. You can’t afford the casino anymore, Dad.” Dad laughs and rolls his eyes.

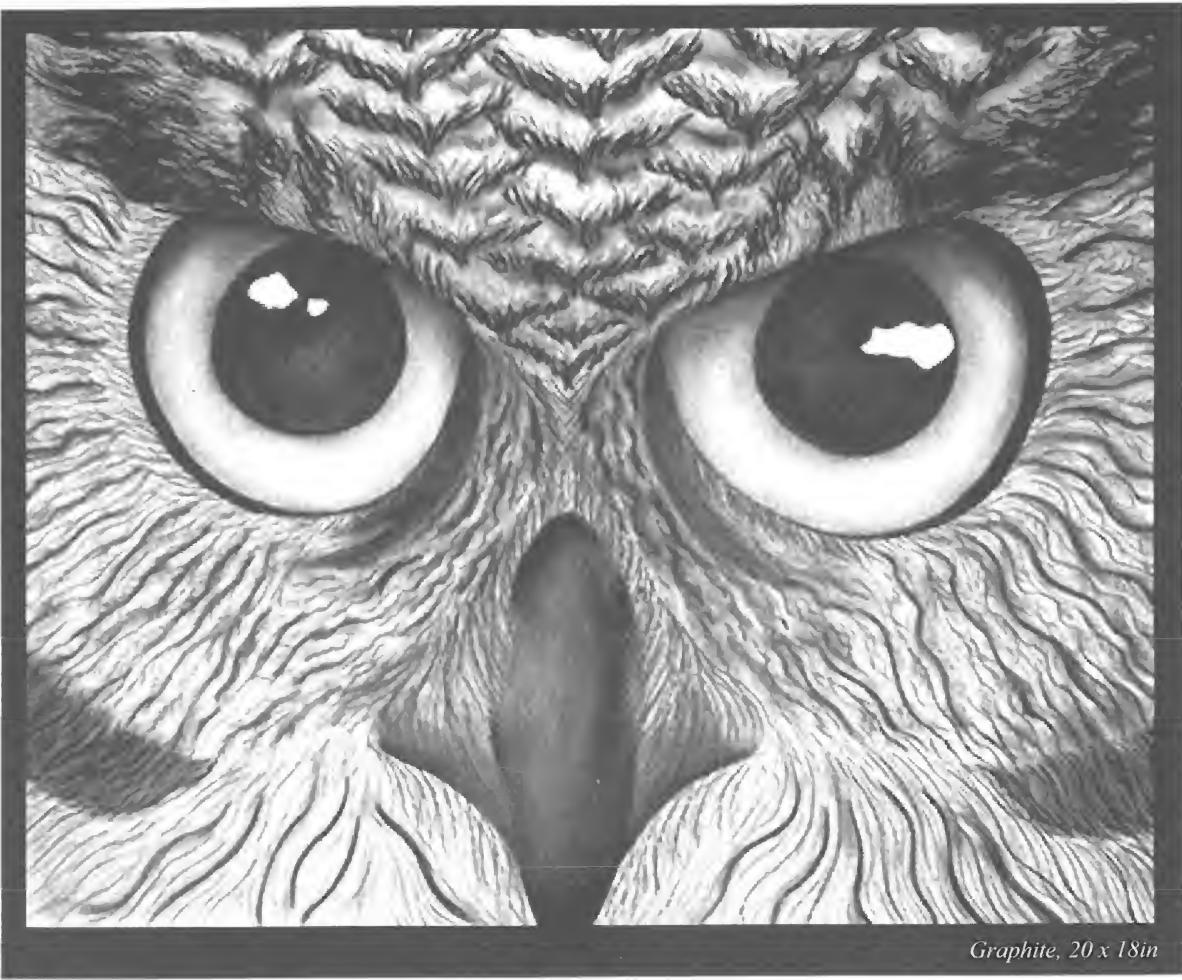
“I don’t have to listen to your nonsense,” he said, walking out of the kitchen. I hurried after him, anger rising up within me.

"I'm all you have left now, do you want me to go too?"

"Yeah, right," Dad said, brushing me off.

"You're a mess, Dad, and gambling is taking over your life. I'm tired of it. No matter what I say, you don't seem to understand my frustration. You can't keep doing this anymore, you're driving everyone away and that next person just might be me." Dad shakes his head and chuckles, continuing to walk away. "Fine, you don't think I'm serious?" I say and walk out the door.

Amanda Duncan, *Tribal Owl*



Graphite, 20 x 18in

Zach Vierling, *Mother and Son*



Ink Pen, 18 x 20in

Pug Life

Michael W. Steinhour

Our eyes first met through bars.

Lonely, forlorn, hopeless.

Was that yours or mine?

Barks all around us--incessant.

But not you, standing there, tail curled up, gently wagging.

We began a two week trial together.

But after a day you decided to stay.

Since then we've been a dynamic duo: Batpug and The Doctor.

I hand out beat downs of knowledge and you sleep 17 hours a day.

That's teamwork.

Haters may say you're not special.

But they've never heard you snore.



Sam Nirva, Amphora For Mom

Stoneware & Black Slip, 15h x 12w x 12d

Ouroboros

Michael Nichols

The snake bites its tail,
The end is the beginning,
The beginning is the end.
The turning of the planets
Turns the seasons,
Turns lead to gold.
Precious alchemy.
A glance catches a smile.
Hands cover hands.
Moments gleam and
Thoughts flash.
Spells are cast, formulas are written.
For someone, for an instant, you are
the sun.
But spells can falter, formulas fade.
Thoughts dim,
Moments dull,
Hands slip apart,
And a glance catches a frown.
The snake bites its tail,
The end is the beginning,
The beginning is the end.
The turning of the planets
Turns the seasons,
Turns gold to lead.
Precious alchemy.



Charcoal, 22 x 12 in

Chris Blanchard, *Downtown*

My Grandpa's Garden in Osceola, Indiana

Kylie Hill

The soles of my bare feet squish into the rich soil, but there's something else mixed in, a carpeted material. My grandpa installed it in the ground years ago to help prevent scraggly and unsightly weeds. It feels a little rough against the side of my feet. A sweet, yet earthy smell fills my nostrils: the grass and the sweet aroma of ripe vegetables mixed with dirt. In front of me are light green, fuzzy vines woven around large, silver, wire cylinders. On each cylinder there are three wire poles stuck in a triangle formation. They are closer together near the bottom and bow out at the top. On the top of the poles are wire circles that repeat two more times and end about three quarters of the way down, creating a three tiered support system for the vines to grow on. On the vines are darker green leaves that feel velvety on the top, but smooth on the bottom when you run your fingers over them. Hanging from the vines are various sizes of plump, round tomatoes. Some are red, some yellow, some green, and some have more than one color. Each one has a small green crown where its stem connects to the vine.

I reach out to pick one when a gruff bark startles me. Behind me, the neighbor's large, black dog is barking at a small, brown squirrel that just scurried up an old oak tree. Through the metal chain link fence, I can see his taut muscles as he puts his front paws on the tree. He raises and extends his neck so he's looking up high into the network of branches with protruding leaves. I look to my right and see my grandparents' enclosed porch. It's made of brown wood, the same as the house. There's long, clear windows going all around the enclosure. Inside are paint cans, shelves with tools, odds and ends, a wooden work table with my grandpa's home-made train track, and one of his circular saws complete with his saw dust collector made from panty-hose. I look to my left and see the large two-sided shed. One side is more like a barn. The double doors are ajar and you can see my grandpa's lawn mower and a large stack of pine two-by-fours. The other side has a garage door. The door is closed—a rare occasion. Next to the shed is a large steel cage on top of a small mound. It's filled to the brim with boxes, paper, and some old leaves still linger in the bottom. My grandpa is due to light it soon and burn it all away.

My Grandpa Bob comes down the steps. He's wearing tan trousers, his brown work boots, and a light blue button down shirt with small, white, vertical stripes evenly spaced. His grey curly beard touches his shirt collar and his large wire glasses are slipping on his nose just a little. In one hand he's carrying a large, white bucket filled about halfway with warm, soapy water. In the other, he has a fat, globe-shaped, red polka-dotted salt shaker. He comes into the garden and sets the

bucket down next to the tomato plant in front of me. He bends his back and knees a little to look at one of the lower tiers of the tomato support cage. He lifts his hand and points his index at the vine. At eight years old, the vine is at eye level for me. I look at where he is pointing and I see it: a fat green worm that is almost the exact same shade as the vine. It has small, diagonal, white stripes and a row of small, black dots on its body. You can see the ridges of its feet, its curved head, and the little red tail that sticks out on the opposite end.

“Go ahead and pull ‘im right off and plop him in the bucket. The soap kills them. If we don’t get them off, they’ll ruin my tamatas.”

My grandpa hands me a pair of oversized gardening gloves. I slip them on and my hands are swimming in them. But I look at my grandpa’s smiling face, and a spark of excitement enters me. I reach out, grab the worm by his middle and pry him from the vine. He resists, and I can hear the stickiness of his feet pull from the fuzzy vine, almost like Velcro. When I get him off the vine, I hold him up to my face to examine him. He gives me the shivers. I drop him into the bucket. He makes a tiny splash and a “plop” sound. Even though the worms are gross, looking for them feels like a game—kind of like Hidden Pictures, since the worms blend in with the plants. As I scan the plants looking for more pests, my grandpa plucks a perfectly red tomato from the vine. He grasps it in his hand, and twists until the thin stem disconnects from the vine. He turns it over, then rubs it on the front of his shirt. He takes a bite, sprinkles a little salt, and then takes another.

“Kylie, come over here and try this tomata!”

I take a bite. The juices explode in my mouth. The membrane of skin, the soft flesh, and the juicy seeds all mix in my mouth to create a wonderful texture and savory taste; the natural acidity and earthy taste mixes with the salt and reaches every taste bud.

“This is delicious, Grandpa! Guess what?! I found worms! Can I go show Grandma?!”

He puts one arm around me and picks up the bucket with his other hand. He smells of wood shavings and soil. We walk through the garden, passing boxed flower beds, rhubarb stalks, the potato patch, green beans, and pepper plants in order to make it back to the porch and then the house. I curl into his side and bite into the sweet tomato, savoring its fresh garden taste while a grin stretches across my face.

My grandpa’s garden was a cornucopia of fruits, vegetables, and flowers. Every season, something was growing in that patch of earth on the left side of his yard, buzzing with new life, whether it was plants, insects, or small animals. He always tended to it with great care and used it to teach his grandkids something: how to work hard, cultivate vegetation, or live life. He taught me how to harvest rhubarb, how potatoes are grown in the ground, and how to keep birds away from your strawberries: “Just get some small, smooth rocks, paint them red, with the green leaves and little black dots. The birds will peck at them, and then when the real one’s grow, they won’t try to eat

them."

I always felt safe there, with the light breeze brushing against my face and blowing my hair and the sun warming my body. Something about his backyard and garden was different than anywhere else. I was awed by its wonder and comforted by its familiarity. It had a magical feel. It felt like home.

With my grandpa's death came the death of the garden. My aunt tried to keep it up and running for a few years after grandpa died, but it wasn't the same. It lost some of its warmth. The magic disappeared; as the flowers withered, so did the magic. But the memories are still there. The garden lives on in my heart. And I can look back and feel the magic and the warmth. I can be home.

Ashley Brinkman, *Amphora For Mom*



Stoneware & Black Slip, 18h x 15w x 15d

Oxygen's Green Light

Kylie Hill

I see the green light
Filling the sky.
It moves in waves,
Spirals, zig zags, folds,
As if it were dancing
To a song
That can only be heard
Out there in the universe.

It is wispy and elegant.
Its energy pulses in the sky.
Its brightness and movement
Increases as if the song crescendos.

The earth is bathed in a green hue.

The snow and lakes carry a faint tint
As the light reflects onto them.
Dawn breaks and blue and green
Blend together,
Forming a stunning gradient.
The last remnants of visible stars linger,
Twinkling softly through the green cloud

The green light is just Oxygen.
A gas made up of tiny atoms.
Yet it glows bright
As electrons rush through the atmosphere.

I can see the green light,
And I am mystified by its beauty.
These particles colliding and charging
Are now visible.
They seem real.
And nature has never seemed so amazing.



Gloria Michelle Leonard, Moon Series

Broken

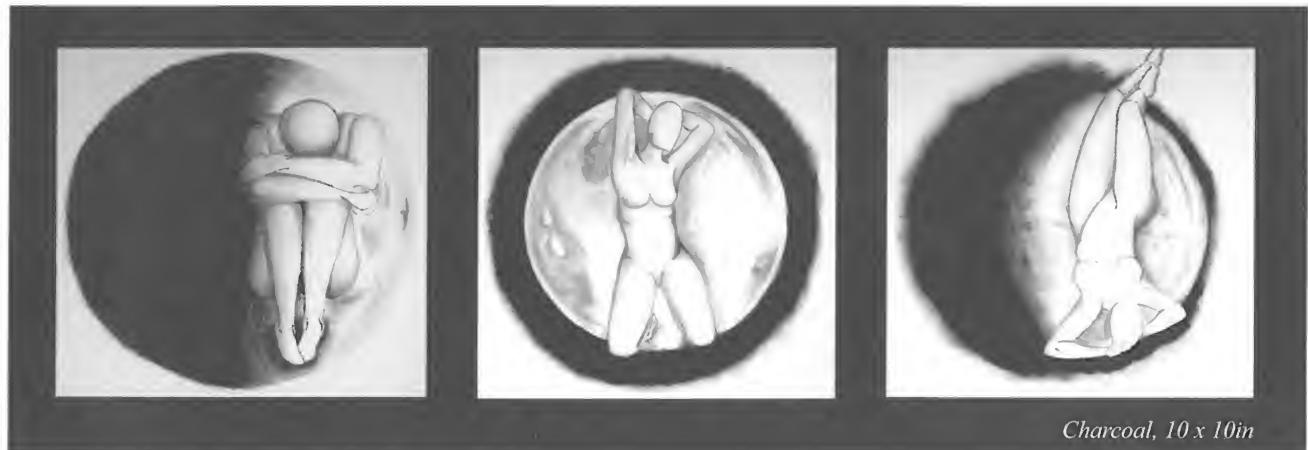
Katie Davisson

There's just something so beautiful about a broken soul.
The pieces that you find lying on the ground next to the clothes from the night before, How it tries to hide the shards, but they fall from the pockets wanting to be seen.
Then you pick them up, inspecting the muddy glass with a new, extreme clarity, knowing that you can't put them back together again, but perhaps you can make something entirely new.

Hungry

Katie Davisson

I don't know why I'm up this early or why I'm so hungry, but I just keep thinking about your lips and how they might taste against mine. Then my stomach growls, and I find myself starving for something I can't crave.



Charcoal, 10 x 10in

Do You Think of Me

Kylie Hill

Sometimes I think of you
When I see a musician,
A young man with glasses reading a book
Or writing an essay.

I see in them that same look
Of concentration and of intellect.
I see that same drive and ambition.
And I think of you.

I speak of great Literature,
Read great authors, and see plays performed.
Hamlet, The Crucible, The Sun Also Rises.
And I think of you.

I hear your laugh,
The careful enunciation of your words,
As we discuss theme, metaphors, and diction.

Sometimes when I think of you
I pause.
And I remember us:
How our hands touched,
Gently at first, but then securely,
As if they belonged together;
How nervous you were,
And how nervous I was;
And how your cheeks flushed crimson
When I smiled at you.

I stand outside my door,
Take out my small silver key,
And I think of you.
The smell of your cologne,
That was just uniquely you.
How you made my stomach turn upside down
When you smiled at me.
Then the brush of your lips against mine.

“I’m sorry,” you said.
Your retreating back
Was all that I could see.

“Click!” went your car door.
The engine rumbled.
You left.
I remember the tears
And the burning sensation in my chest.

But I still think of you.
Your intelligence, laughter, and music.
And I wonder...
Do you think of me?



Judy Kanne, *Reconstruction*

Mixed Media Collage, 18in x 24in



Graphite, 8 x 12in

Nicole B. Thomsen, *Smoked Gouda & Cut Throats*

The Touch of an Imaginary Man

Alyssa Cook

“Where were you last night?” Katie asked as Ingrid opened the door to their apartment with a slight creak. “I was really worried about you.”

Katie walked next to Ingrid as she stumbled inside. For once, she was grateful for her doting roommate. Sure, at 8 a.m. Katie could be a little annoying, but she did appreciate the concern. She only wished she had a harrowing story to match it.

Ingrid shook her head and dropped her purse by the door. Her frizzy brown hair was escaping her ponytail in rebellious little wisps. She slumped onto the sofa and rubbed at the dark bags under her light blue eyes. “You wouldn’t believe me if I told you,” she finally mumbled.

“What happened?” Katie said, looking alarmed. She stared at Ingrid’s disheveled hair and haggard appearance earnestly, noting every detail like a worried mother, probably assuming the worst.

“I was working,” Ingrid said. Mostly true...true enough for Katie to buy anyway.

“I thought your shift ended at midnight,” Katie said suspiciously.

The next sentence hung on Ingrid’s tongue: “I went to the library to study,” but she couldn’t make herself say it. “It’s not important,” she said instead.

“Come on, Ingrid,” Katie said. “Tell me anyway. I won’t judge you or anything. I was just worried. That’s all.”

Ingrid wished there was something to tell other than the truth. You want the truth? Ingrid thought. Grad school has completely taken over my life. I thought I had no life in college? Well, I never fell asleep in the library on a pile of textbooks in college. Why can’t I have a life? Ingrid’s mind hovered one thought. Why couldn’t she have a life? If only for today? It wouldn’t hurt anyone, and anything was better than falling asleep on a pile of books in the library, right? So Ingrid nodded. “Okay,” she said, “if you must know, I went home with a customer.”

Excitement surged through Ingrid as Katie smiled and covered her mouth. She let out a dramatic gasp as if Ingrid’s lie was a juicy hunk of celebrity gossip. “You didn’t,” she exclaimed. “Was he cute?”

“He looked a little like Tom Cruise,” Ingrid said, watching Katie’s face as she ate up every word. “His hair was perfect too. It was dark, and even though he was thirty-one, he didn’t look a day over twenty-four. His eyes were the most beautiful blue-green ever. That’s what attracted me to him in the first place. He sat at a corner table and ordered a beer, and when I brought it to him, he looked up at me with those perfect eyes. I felt like he was looking straight through me. He asked me to sit

there with him and ordered me a drink, an expensive one too.”

“Oh my god!” Katie squealed. “What was his name?”

“He told me it was David,” Ingrid said. David, David, David, she thought. I’ll have to remember that.

“Oooh, David,” Katie said. “No last name?”

“Emerson,” Ingrid said, blurting out the first name that came to mind.

“He stayed there with you the whole night?” Katie asked, eagerly.

“Well, I had to go back to work eventually,” Ingrid said, “but he waited until I got off.”

“Aww,” Katie said, placing her hands dramatically on her chest, “love at first sight! How romantic!”

“He gave me a ride on his motorcycle after that,” Ingrid said, grinning as she pictured him. She knew she might regret the lie later, but Katie’s reaction was worth it. “We went back to his condo for a little nightcap. And he has a pillow-top!”

“Was it good?” Katie asked. She said it softly as if she knew she wasn’t supposed to ask it. Ingrid knew she should have stopped there and refused to give details, but she couldn’t help it.

“So good,” Ingrid continued, “like Hollywood without the cameras. Last night was the best night of my life.”

“Damn, Ingrid,” Katie said Ingrid finished the story, “you always meet the best guys. Maybe I should start waitressing.”

“It’s really not that interesting,” Ingrid said, shrugging as she stretched out on the couch and smiled to herself. “I just got lucky.”

Ingrid brushed a piece of stringy hair out of her eyes as she balanced a tray with five beers on it. The thick condensation on the bottles shone in the low bar lights and sparkled as she moved, droplets slipping gracefully down the bottle necks and blurring the labels. Ingrid looked to the tables ahead of her and sighed as she recalled the orders she had memorized moments earlier. She set the first two down at a table for two. The man’s hand closed around his beer, but he otherwise ignored her. His eyes were locked on the woman with the low-cut top sitting across from him. He murmured something, and she giggled. Ingrid shook her head and moved on. Some relationships just made her want to vomit.

She set down the next beers between two men, truck drivers by the look of them. Ingrid nodded as she gave them their orders and attempted to rush past them. “Not so fast,” the first one said. He was an enormous man with sparse patches of sharp gray hair and a potbelly hanging out slightly below his shirt. He croaked when he talked, and even from across the table Ingrid could

smell the lingering stench of his last cigarette. She shuddered. Not in a million lifetimes, she thought. The second one slapped the back of her thigh as she went by. She shook her head. Why were truck drivers always so disgusting?

She finally arrived at the last table, a corner booth. A man with brown hair sat there alone. He looked up at her as she approached and smiled. His dark eyes sparkled with the low lights as he gazed at her. She felt her cheeks flush red as he said, "Thanks." She smiled back and said "You're welcome." The words felt strange on her lips. She had never addressed a customer like that, especially during late shifts.

"So...Ingrid," he said, glancing at her nametag as he took a quick drink of beer, "what are you doing in a dive like this?"

"I'm working," Ingrid said quickly, "my way through grad school, you know. Money is money." She brushed her hair out of her eyes and silently prayed that her skirt would hide the curves near her waist.

"Yeah, that's good," he said, taking another drink. "You from around here?"

Another waitress caught her eye as she moved past, shooting her a glare. She knew she had to get back to waiting tables, but she didn't want to pull herself away. She looked at him longingly. He was perfect, the man she had described to Katie to a T. Here was the man Ingrid had desired ever since she imagined him a week ago. She wanted him to invite her into his bed—just once. All she needed was one chance to prove herself. She told herself that one night would be enough, but as she gazed at his chiseled features and able hands, she realized that one night wouldn't suffice at all. She wanted to spend every night with the stranger she had just met. She wanted his hands to caress her shoulders while she kissed him and sank her slender fingers deep into his hairline.

"D-do you have a name?" Ingrid asked. She blushed warmer as she said it, and she immediately regretted addressing him so directly. Part of her still wanted to play the innocent girl she had been in high school. This girl was the sort who was pursued by plenty of guys, but only chose the best, the one who would kiss her gently and beg her to save her deflowering for marriage. But that girl was pushed to the back of her mind as she stared at the man sitting in front of her, waiting for him to answer her question.

"My friends call me Dave," he said.

Ingrid's eyes widened, and she turned slightly so he wouldn't notice the crimson filling her cheeks. It was fate, and this proved it! She had received a glimpse of the future as she'd described her supposed one-night stand to her roommate, and that night it would come true.

Then, her common sense finally spoke up. "Careful, Ingrid," it warned. "Don't fling yourself at him. You have to see if he's interested." She sighed. It was good advice.

Then, her mind settled on the perfect test. She'd play a little hard to get. If she went back to

work and he called her over again, it was undeniably fate. She felt herself relax as she put together the plan in her mind. It would be perfect and such a romantic story to tell afterwards.

"I should...really get back to work," Ingrid said.

The man nodded and waved slightly as Ingrid walked away. She busied herself with the tables again, stealing glances at the man in the corner booth as often as she could. He continued to stay, and hope filled her heart as she imagined all the romantic twists her life could take from here.

But while he drank, the clock continued to tick, each second he didn't acknowledge her slowly eating away at her hope until finally her shift ended. She drove back to her apartment silently, muting Brad Paisley's "We Danced" as the street lights cast rays of yellow and white over her car. The multicolored lights dotting the skyline blinked at her as she drove by. When she had first arrived at the city, she'd thought they were so romantic, twinkling at her as if inviting her have a more pleasant evening. When she'd arrived at grad school, she'd imagined herself meeting an amazing man and instantly falling in love. After that, she'd swear she was made for city life and never be lonely again.

Ingrid shook her head as she pulled into her parking spot. That naïve girl from her past made her sick to her stomach. Locking her car, she walked up the stairs to her apartment and unlocked the door. Immediately, Katie looked up at her from her position on the couch. "How was it?" she asked excitedly. "Did you see David again today?"

Ingrid started to answer, but stopped and shook her head. Dropping her purse in a heap by the door, she shuffled to her bedroom, both desiring and dreading the small twin bed that waited for only her just inside the door.

Payton Kellenberger, *Endangered Species*



Reaction to the Allegory of the Cave

Alyssa Cook

I've grown accustomed to the shadows,
Which I've been told are all I know.
And how unreal!
That nothingness on a dank cave wall
Is all I want to feel.
Head chained down, eyes straight ahead
Suggests I'm cognitively dead
As Plato thinks.
Yet just behind these dim eyes lurk ideas
Hidden in the facet of a sphinx,
Swirling, growing, changing too:
What each form means to me and not to you.
And to imagine!
To make meaning out of passing shadows,
And feel their passion,
Tiles of sense are pieced together in my head,
My mind working at leisure but never dead.
And what a mind,
Not wise but eager to seek intrigue
And to find.
So, Plato, keep your lofty hope of truth
And while I'm chained here happy, waste your youth
I'm happy still.
I'll stay here pondering secrets of shadowy hills
And curse the sun.

Today He Was a Warrior

Alyssa Cook

Steven's left hand closed around Kara's dainty fingers as his right slipped into his pocket, digging for his house key. As he unlocked the door, she held his free arm. He couldn't help but smile as she followed him through the entryway toward the living room. Beyond it lay the kitchen and dining rooms, and behind those, the bedrooms and bathroom, but he didn't like those rooms as much as the living room. He'd just refurnished it, and besides, that's where the TV and Wii lived.

Things were going better than he expected. They were holding hands more and more, and he had made it through the first kiss without needing his inhaler. He gave a contented sigh. Every time he looked at her slender figure, her straight, brown hair, and her striking green eyes, he felt a strong sense of satisfaction. He had finally found the perfect girl. She understood all of his movie references, and she at least acted like they were hilarious. She hadn't been frightened away by his light saber collection. She had even appreciated the houseplants he'd brought in after reading online that houseplants make women more comfortable. And, best of all, Kara swore she preferred nerdy guys, even though a small part of him still didn't believe her.

"You know what would be fun?" Kara asked as she sprawled out on his sofa.

Steven's eyes widened. "What?" he asked. His voice wavered a little, and he hoped she took it as curiosity rather than fear.

She grinned and patted the spot next to her. He sank into his seat and wrapped his lanky arm around her shoulders. His heart beat faster as Kara kissed him, and relief surged through him as he realized she'd made the first move.

Suddenly, her hand shot out and snatched the Wii controller off the coffee table in front of them. "Legend of Zelda!" Kara exclaimed, shoving the controller into his hands.

Speechless, Steven blinked as Kara rushed to put the disk in. "Oh..." he said, stuttering as his TV screen came to life. "Okay." He grasped the controller, unable to express how badly he wanted to be holding her instead. Her freckly arms and soft, pale skin were covered by a mere sundress and sweater only inches away. He tried to reach around her shoulders and pull her closer. She let him, but her eyes didn't budge from the TV as she furiously clicked at the buttons on the controller.

"Maybe we should...you know. Take a break?" Steven asked as they opened the gate to the Forest Temple and reached the checkpoint.

"Why?" Kara asked. "We're finally getting somewhere."

"Well, we just had a good date, and I thought that we were going to..."

Steven paused. Was he asking too much? He didn't think so. After all, it had been over a

month. Or maybe it was too soon. Maybe, he was coming on too strong. God, he hoped not. They'd only been dating for five weeks and six days, but he already couldn't live without her. He had to make her see that. Finally, there was a girl, a lifetime gamer made for him, and he refused to give up on her, no matter what he had to do.

"Steven, just say what you mean," Kara said with barely a glance. "I can't understand you when you mutter like that." She still didn't make eye contact, and he put his hand on her shoulder, anything to make her turn around.

Steven grabbed her arm. "Kara, look at me." Her emerald eyes met his. "I really like you, and I want to show you how much. That's it."

"Don't rush me," Kara said, getting to her feet.

Panic shot through him. "Kara, please," he said, getting up after her. "I'm sorry! I didn't mean it."

She dug through her purse until she retrieved her phone. "Steven, it's just not working out. I realize that now." She selected a contact and held the phone up to her ear.

"But it was working fine," Steven protested, desperately searching for something to win her back. He couldn't lose her now.

"Look, I really like gaming with you," Kara said. "But if that's the best part, I don't think it's going to go anywhere."

"No, wait!" Steven said. He ran to his bedroom, a temperature-controlled treasure trove of mint-condition collectibles. Movie posters from the original Star Wars trilogy hung on his walls, and his Star Trek action figures stood in a line, perfectly preserved in their boxes. He frantically searched for a treasure valuable enough to impress her, picking up snippets of Kara's conversation as she spoke softly to someone else, hopefully her sister.

Steven eyed his most prized possession. It had cost him several hundred dollars because he'd had it custom-made. Part of him insisted that no girl was worth unsheathing his finest treasure, but his heart spoke more persuasively than ever before. He took it off its shelf and ran back to the entryway where Kara stood, arms crossed as she watched the clock.

"I've never shown this to anyone," Steven said, "but no one's ever meant as much to me as you do."

He held the sheathed sword in his hands so Kara could see the glimmering silver and blue engraving. Recreating the Master Sword from The Legend of Zelda would impress any fan, especially a die-hard one like Kara. He almost smiled in spite of the situation.

"Steven, please don't make this hard," Kara said, her eyes locked on the sword.

Hope filled him as he watched her stare uncertainly at the sword. He knew it was the only thing keeping her in his house, but that was good enough for him. "Please, Kara," he begged. "We

can cosplay every night. It'll be perfect, like a never-ending Comic Con."

"I'm sorry," Kara said, "It might be good for a while, but even cosplay can't revive a dead relationship. Someone's going to pick me up in a few minutes. Sorry, Steven."

Steven stroked the blade gently as he waited for the telltale hum of a motor at the end of his walk. His heart was breaking, but he knew he couldn't cry. That would make things worse. To quell his tears, he took a breath. One question was nagging at his mind, and he knew he had to ask it before her ride showed up.

"What did I do wrong?" Steven asked. The voice that escaped his lips was low and pained.

Kara shook her head and continued to glance at the clock.

"Answer me!" Steven yelled. "What did I do wrong?" His patience snapped as he realized she couldn't answer. She was the one who had ruined everything. But that's okay. He'd forgive her. All she had to do was stay.

He heard the car pull up. He held the sword up, feeling like a true warrior. "What did I do wrong?" he repeated. "I want to know."

"Steven, calm down," Kara said, raising her hands as if to protect herself.

Then, the door opened. A tall man with thick black hair and piercing brown eyes stood on the step.

"What's going on?" he demanded, letting himself in.

"Who are you?" Steven asked. "You're trespassing." He didn't really mean it, but his hand remained raised, clutched around the handle of his sword. Today, he was a warrior. He had to be. Only the Master Sword could defend him now.

"Steven, this is my brother," Kara said. "I have to go now."

Steven shook his head. He didn't believe her—he couldn't. The stranger was trying to take her away from him. He had to defend her.

"Dude, put the sword down, okay?" the man asked. "We're leaving."

"Go away," Steven snarled, approaching the intruder with his sword poised for defense. "You don't live here. Go away."

"You think I'm scared of your geeky toy?" the stranger asked. He grinned, reminding Steven of the villains he had imagined himself fighting so many times. He walked forward unflinchingly until they stood face to face.

"It's not a toy," Steven growled. He took a step forward. His approach was met with another from the stranger. He kept coming as if Steven were a child holding a Nerf sword.

But suddenly the man stopped moving. Steven looked down, and his hands immediately started shaking on the handle as he saw the tip of the sword in his opponent's stomach. Blood was seeping out around the edges, and the man groaned with pain, holding his wound. But he continued

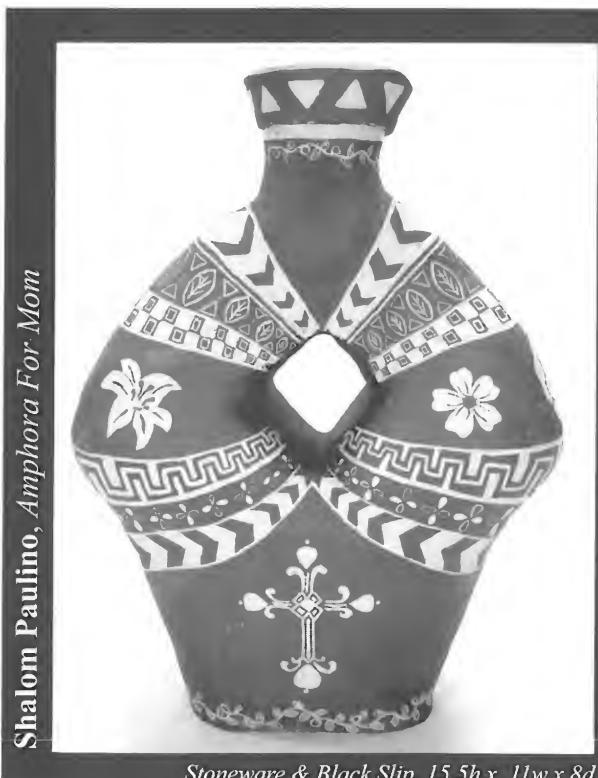
forward, his face twisted with rage. Even the Master Sword had failed to slay the 6'7" giant.

"You stabbed him!" Kara shrieked, running up to the man. "What the hell is wrong with you?"

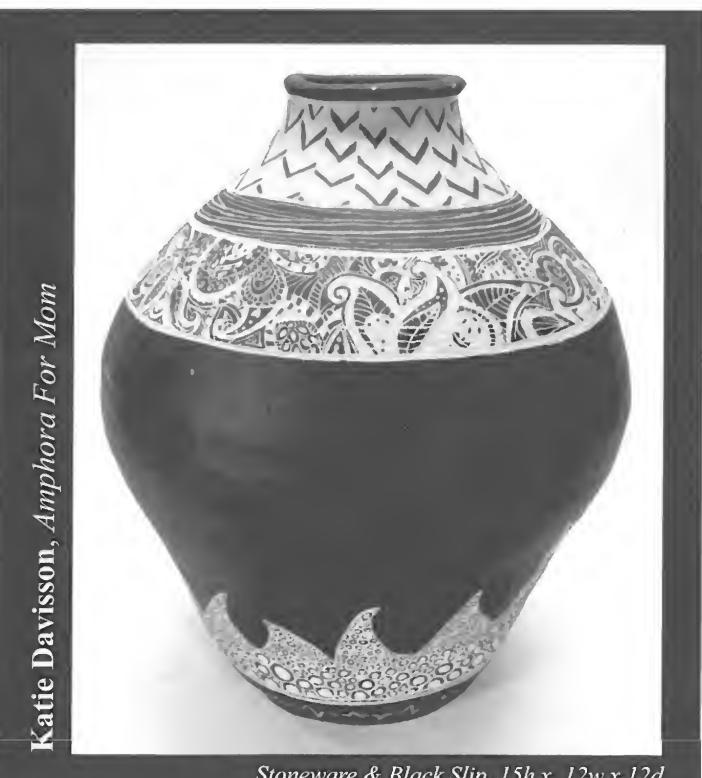
Steven plucked the Master Sword out and backed away, frightened and annoyed that he'd gotten blood all over his favorite sword. "I-I told you it's not a toy," he stuttered, quivering with fear.

Oh god, he thought, the sword wobbling between his trembling fingers, what just happened?

"Oh, you're dead," the man growled, pursuing Steven as he rushed towards the back, intending to lock himself in his bedroom. He glanced back at his opponent just quick enough to see the pot of a ficus raised just inches overhead. He felt a mind-numbing impact as it came down, and he heard the thick clay shatter. The room spun and then grew dark as shimmering orbs fell around him. He blinked desperately, trying to regain his composure to fight, but the colors wouldn't stop spinning around him. He sighed as he realized his fate; he'd always had a soft skull, and now it had become his own proverbial "heel." Today he was a warrior, and as his life bar fell closer to the red zone, he was sure to meet a warrior's end.



Shalom Paulino, *Amphora For Mom*



Katie Davisson, *Amphora For Mom*

Stoneware & Black Slip, 15.5h x 11w x 8d

Stoneware & Black Slip, 15h x 12w x 12d

Ave Maria

T.M.A.Day

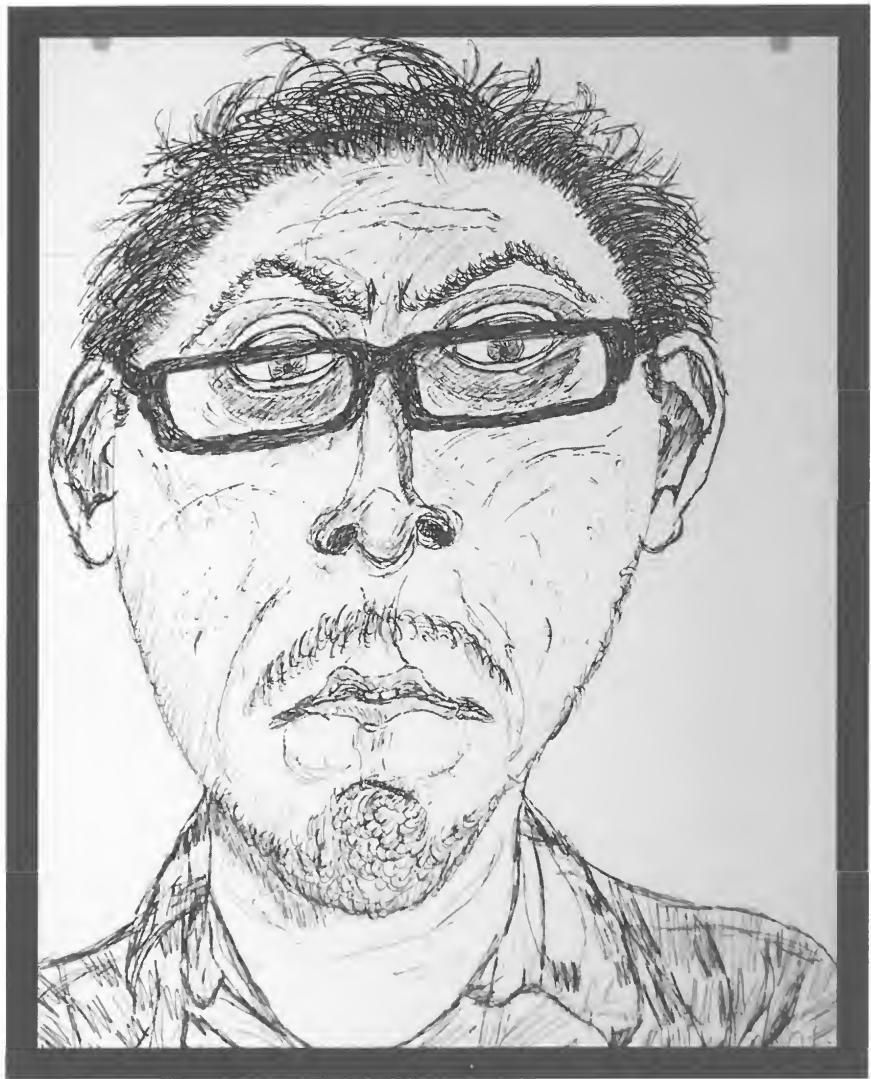
For the time being.

White branches, white vines,
Twisting limbs like broken spines,
Redding spots like frozen blood,
Enamel floor on bracken mud,
Pearly puff on still top pines;
The needles as an emerald brine,
The dapper sun upon his seat,
Shines bright & clear & without heat,
Shows all as if a darkling jewel,
Creation's shining silver pool,
Filled with shadows & with light,
A winter morn is quite a sight,
Yet one must sigh, and one must say,
That all of this shall pass away.
But as it goes, one just might see,
A slight grey glimpse of eternity.

This grey is an odding, twilight thing,
With fairies air and silent wing
That in betwixt the silent shade,
Descends upon a hidden glade,
A silent pool upon a hill,
Under the leaves and limbs so still,
A frozen cloud upon the height,
Or passing through dim starlight,
That works the wonder frenzy till,

One's mind is turning like a mill,
And mossy banks upon the brook,
Or the lines inside a battered book,
Or firelight bright inside the dark,
With sky filled high with golden spark,
Show that simply, straightly, bent,
All of life's a sacrament.

This passing of the good and grey,
Is a thing that's here to stay,
Till Time at least, upon his post,
Retires and leaves, without a boast
And the Author puts down His pen,
Fills the inkwell, checks once again,
And all is as He thought it should,
Mirrored in infinite, kingly Good,
And though men sigh upon the night,
Of beauties passing, firm and bright,
Of sweetness, glory, and honor lost,
And resistance melting like morning frost,
Comfort shall come in a peculiar way:
That all of this was child's play,
For He shall sigh (and without yawn),
The grey today will turn to dawn.



Joel Arreguin, *Self Portrait*

Ink Pen, 11in x 17in

Kristina Hemmerling, *Flowers in the Wind*
Pen & Ink on Paper, 18in x 24in





Victoria Berenda, August to November in Stitches Series

Fiber & Mixed Media, 6h x 6w x 2d



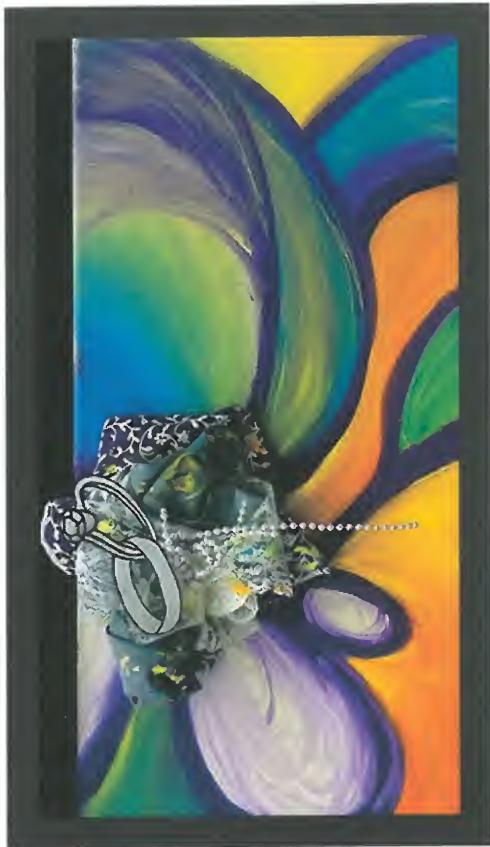
Nicole Bradie Thomsen, *Coconut Dracula*
Oil Painting on Wood, 30in x 30in



Ashley Brinkman, *Grandma Mounds*
Oil Painting on Canvas, 16in x 20in



Victoria Berenda, August to November in Stitches Series
Fiber & Mixed Media, 6h x 6w x 2d



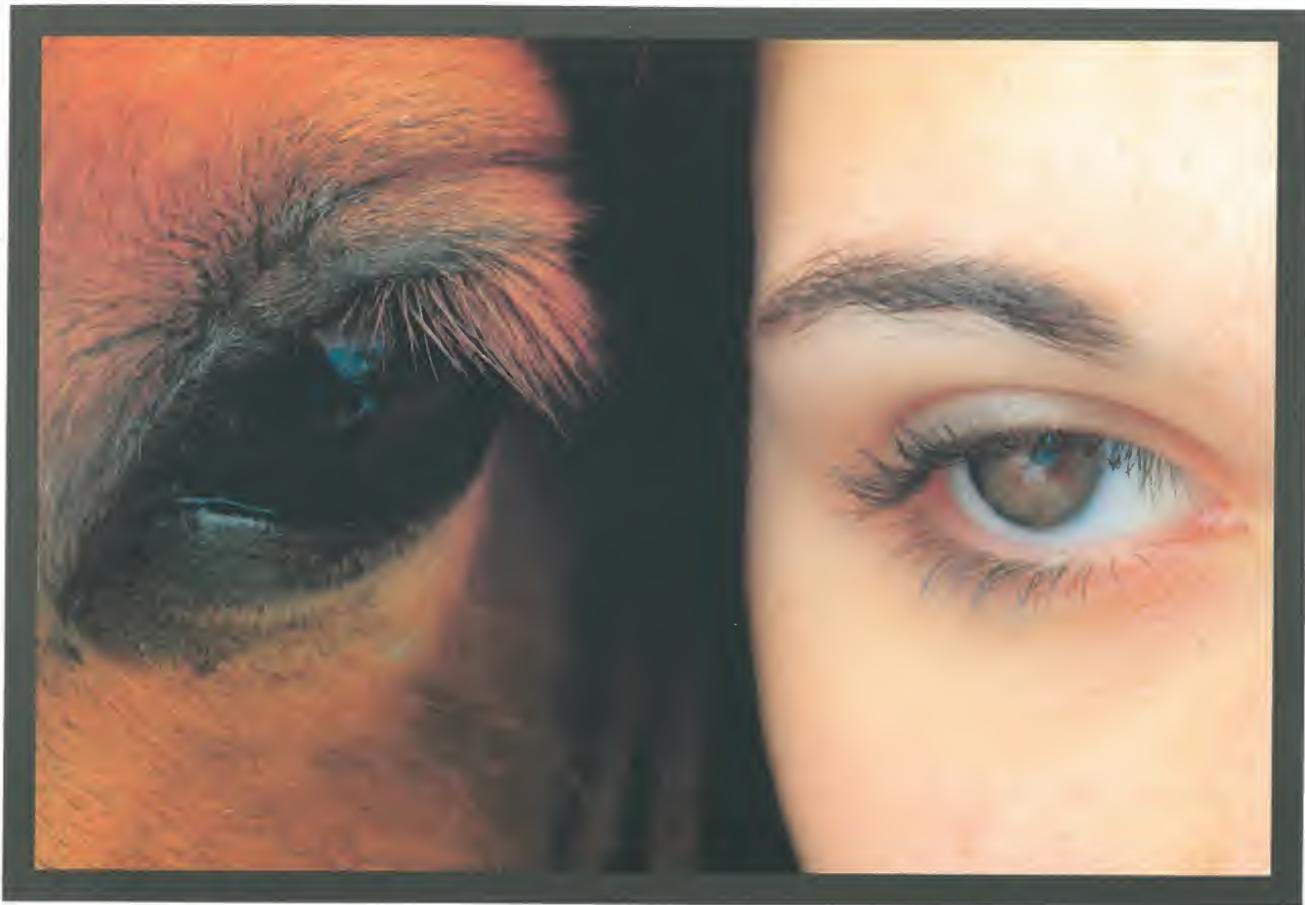
Victoria Berenda, *Two Became One*
(Top Left) Oil on Canvas & Mixed Media, 12in x 20in

Katie Davisson, *My Voice*
(Top Right) Oil Painting on Canvas, 22in x 28in

Nicole Bradie Thomsen, *The Hanging Man*
(Bottom Left) Oil Painting on Wood, 30in x 30in

Casey Snow, Untitled

(Below) Digital Photography, 10in x 14in



Photos on opposite page:

Bonnie Zimmer, Rural Hybrids: Improvistation I

(Top Left) Corn Cob Stems, Found Objects, Cotton Threads, Beads, 8h x 6w x 1d

Katie Davisson, Animal Human Hybrid: Bird Lady

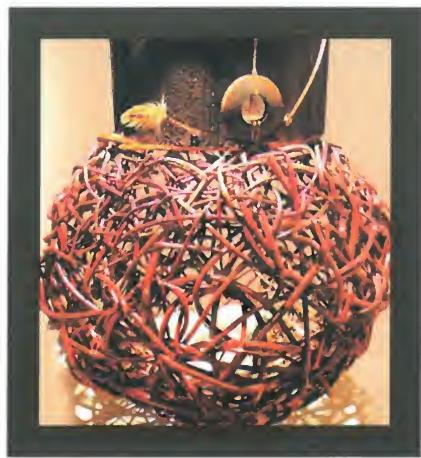
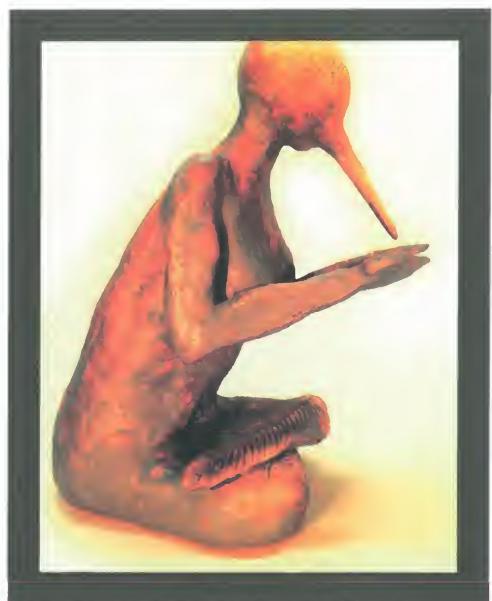
(Top Right) Stoneware & Iron Oxide, 8h x 3w x 4d

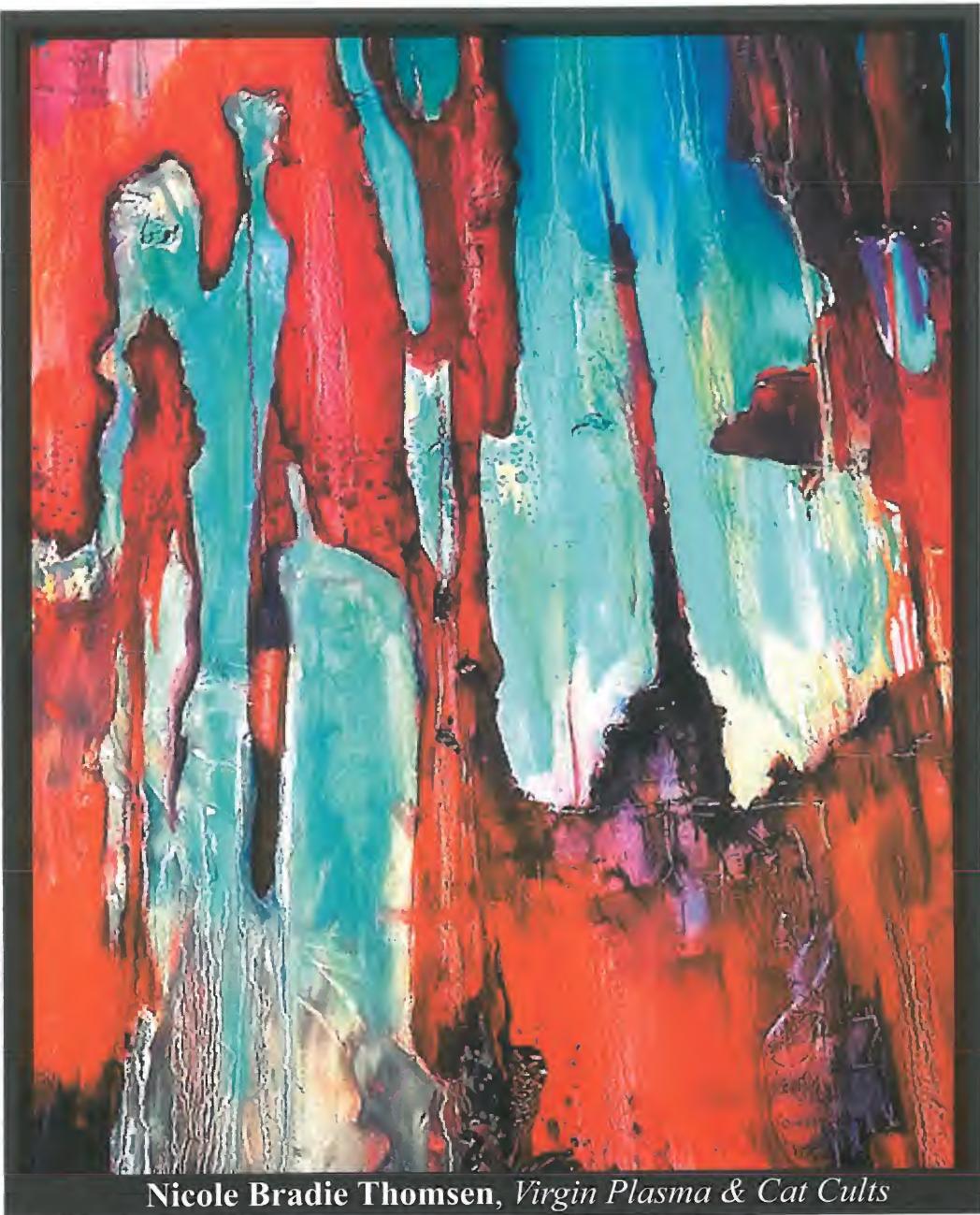
Bonnie Zimmer, Painted Lady

(Bottom Left) Natural & Found Materials, Waxed Linen, Beads, Enamel Paint, 17.5h x 18w x 18d

Ashley Pallo, Animal Human Hybrid: Ballet

(Bottom Right) Stoneware & Iron Oxide, 10h x 12w x 6d





Nicole Bradie Thomsen, *Virgin Plasma & Cat Cults*

Oil Painting on Canvas, 36in x 48in



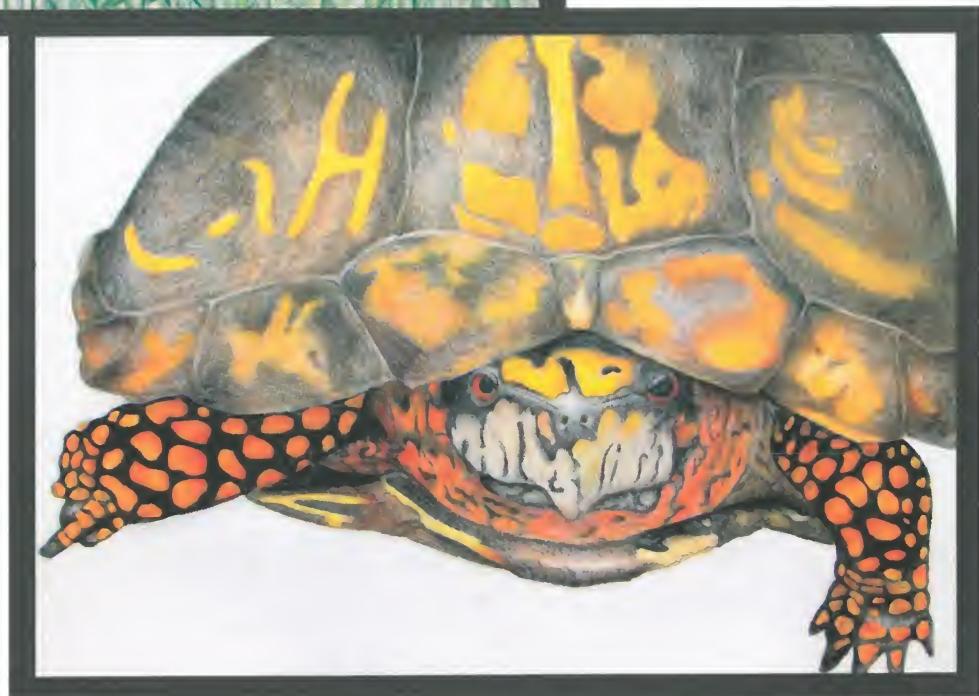
Corey Crum, *Breaking the Funny Bone*

Oil Painting on Panel, 12in x 12in



Payton Kellenburger,
Sustainability Series:
Dragonfly: Searching
Prismacolor, 8in x 9in

Payton Kellenburger
Sustainability Series:
Turtle: Boxed In
Prismacolor, 8in x 9in





Victoria Berenda, August to November in Stitches Series
Fiber & Mixed Media, 6h x 6w x 2d

Lauren Elizabeth Fernandez,

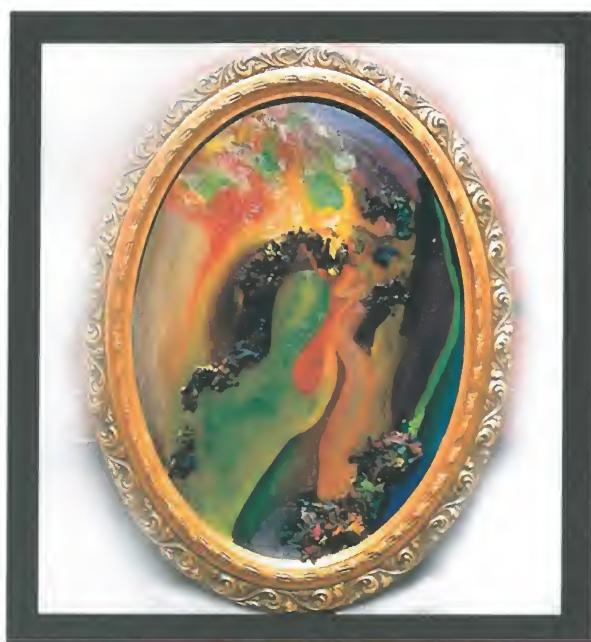
La Rosa Luna

Painted Stool, 36in x 14in

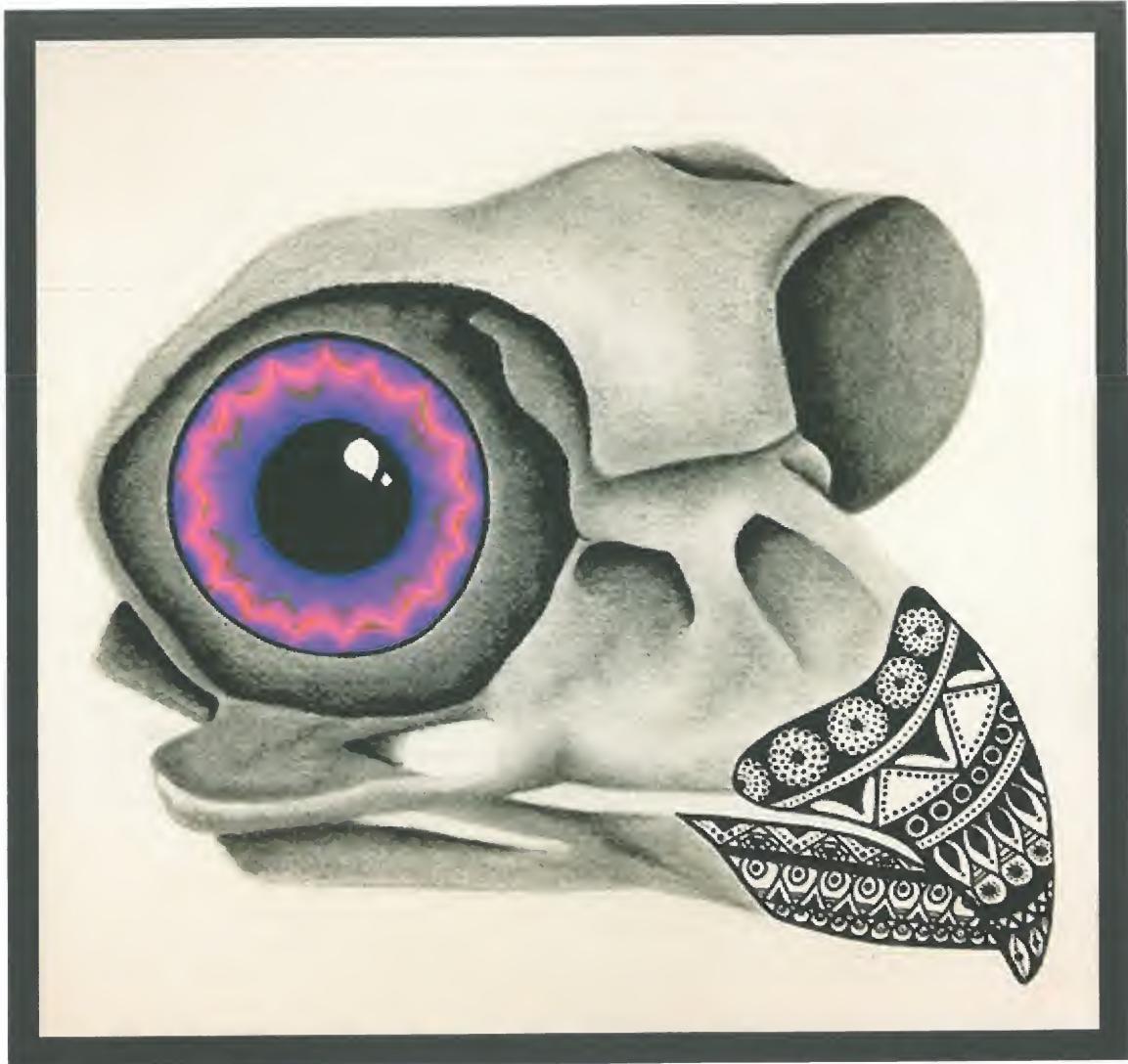


Nicole Bradie Thomsen,
The Red Line: CHICAGO
Photography, 11in x 17in





Amanda Duncan, Tribal Skull
Colored Pencil & Black Ink, 18in x 18in



Pam Hueser, Plastic Bag
(Top Left) Digital Photography, 10in x 14in

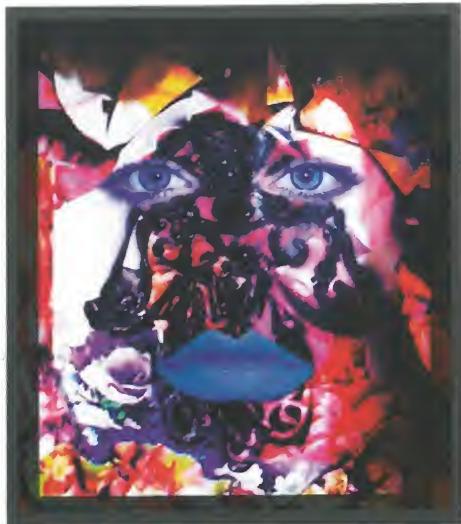
Carla Luzadde, Sunset Series
(Top Left) Oil on Canvas, 24in x 12in

Kristina Hemmerling, Mirror, Mirror
(Top Right) Oil on Canvas, 14in x 16in

Ashley Brinkman, Animal Human Hybrid
(Bottom Right) Stoneware & Iron Oxide, 4h x 8w x 4d



Victoria Berenda, *August to November in Stitches Series*
Fiber & Mixed Media, 6h x 6w x 2d



Samantha Rains,
Vanitas

(Top Right)
Oil Painting on Canvas,
18in x 24in

Sarah Beetz,
Mirror of Myself

(Top Right)
Digital Photography,
10in x 14in

Casey Snow,
Untitled

(Bottom Right)
Digital Photography,
10in x 14in



Corey Crum, *Floating Flesh Factory*

Oil Painting on Panel, 12in x 12in

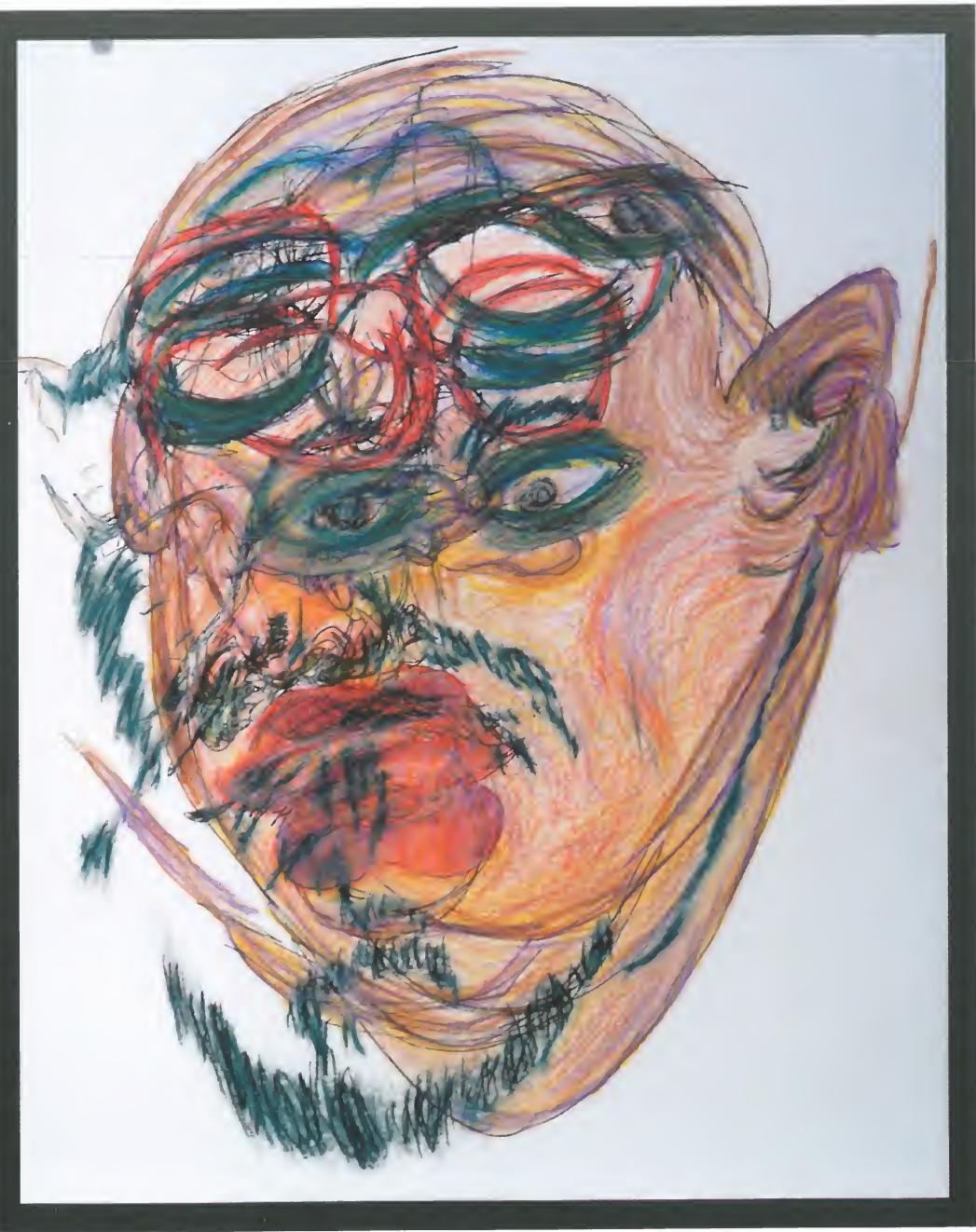


Nicole Bradie Thomsen, *Fran's Finkly Flesh Bra*
Oil Painting on Wood, 14in x 24in



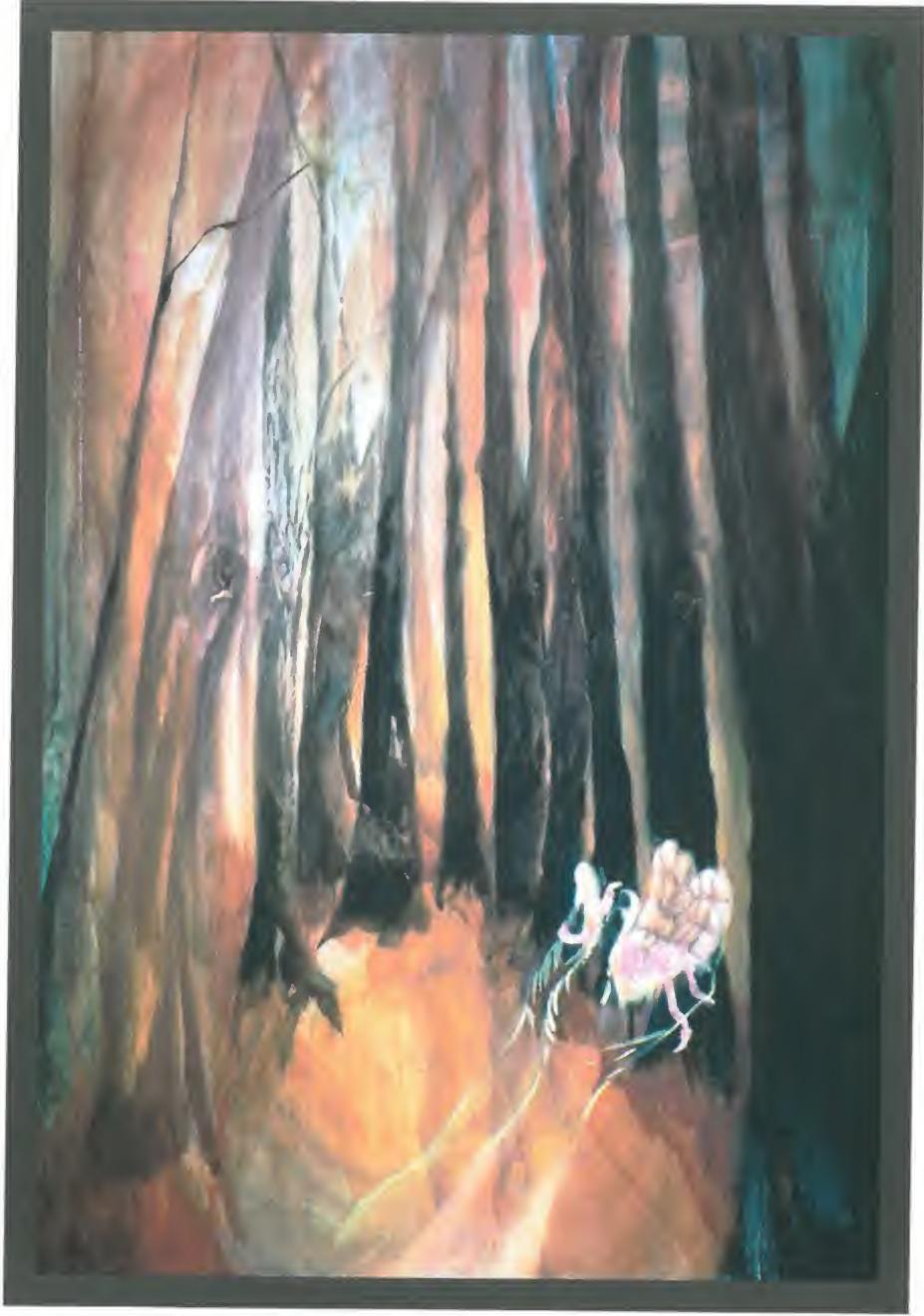
Joel Arreguin, *Blind Contour Self Portrait Looking in a Mirror*

Ink Pen & Colored Pencil, 14in x 11in



Samantha Rains, Stewards of All Creation

Oil Painting on Wood, 36in x 22in



Nicole Bradie Thomsen, *Bellome Blues*
Oil Painting on Canvas, 12in x 14in



Corey Crum, Neolithic Skull Cap

Oil Painting on Panel, 12in x 12in





Anastasia Marsh, *Anatomical*
Stoneware & Iron Oxide, 6h x 10w x 10d

Patience Keen, *Hybrid*
Stoneware & Iron Oxide, 3h x 3w x 6d





Brienne Hooker, *Central Park*

Digital Photography, 14in x 17in

Love and Shampoo

Meghan Hennessey

Climbing up with a handful of star decals to paste on the bathroom ceiling, Claire sees a suspect-looking shampoo bottle on the cluttered top shelf. She squints at it trying to decide where it came from. Carefully placing the stars in organized patterns she glues them down carefully and occasionally looks over at the shampoo bottle.

It isn't one of hers. It is a bright blue and deep scarlet red. The bottle is tiny, only about 8 ounces. Clare would never buy such an impractical amount of soap in such a provocative bottle. It stands out amongst the other bottles on the shelf. The only reason that she hadn't seen it until now was because it was up so high and pushed so far back.

Once all of the stars are in place she reaches out and picks the bottle up. It's completely full, seemingly untouched. She opens the top and smells it. A sigh escapes her throat. The shampoo smells like heaven. Claire forgets her previous apprehension about the bottle and quickly shuts the bathroom door.

She plugs the drain in the tub and lets it fill to the brim with hot water. Unscrewing the cap on the bottle she dumps half of it into the tub. Swirling her hands around in the water, she works up a bubbly mess. Pulling off her dirty work clothes she carefully lowers herself into the steaming water. The smell of the soap wraps itself around her. Wetting her hair down she uses the rest of the bottle to wash it.

As she sits in the water she again starts to wonder where the bottle came from. Perhaps she had bought it and just forgotten. There was a time when she was carefree and did silly little things to indulge herself, like buying ridiculous shampoo. Then a horrible thought came into her head. Maybe her husband, Roy, had had another woman over. The woman could have easily left the tiny bottle lost within the cluttered shelf. But the bottle had been completely full. What would have been the point of bringing shampoo if you weren't going to use it?

It would make sense, though, for Roy to have another woman. He and Claire had been drifting apart for years. Once they had been married for long enough they had stopped with cute romance. There were no flowers on Valentine's Day or date nights anymore. Roy came home late from work and didn't ever have much to say.

The water in the tub was cold now. The bubbles were gone and the sweet scent of the shampoo was absorbed into Claire's skin now. She climbed up out and dried herself off. She tossed the now empty bottle into the trashcan. Just as she sat down at the kitchen table she heard the front

door being unlocked. Roy walked in and smiled at her as he went past. Before he had left the room though he turned around. "You finally found the shampoo?" He asked.

She nodded a confused yes, and Roy smiled at her again.

"I'm glad you liked it."

Roy turned to leave the room and Claire felt her heart flutter. She smiled.

Joel Arreguin, Expressive Tree



Ink Pen, 18 x 18in

Kennel Personal

Meghan Hennessey

I open the cage door and stick my hand in. Almost immediately the poor little dog slinks back to the far corner of the cage. My heart sinks and I let out a sigh. Frustrated and impatient, I stand up and reclose the cage door. The dog moves away from the corner and watches me intently as I move about the kennel.

In my head I begin to think through all of the different ways I can get the dog out of the cage. I rule out just grabbing him. There is nothing worse than being bitten by an intensely frightened dog. I have two choices. Either snare him with a looped leash and drag him out or tip the cage upside down and shake him out. Both options seem a little cruel. It's not like I have a choice, though. The dog has to be put into a kennel in order to be effectively treated.

The other dogs are growing impatient with me now. They all jump up on the kennels, whining and barking. I look at the clock. It's past feeding time. Quickly I decide to flip the cage over and hope the dog comes out. The poor thing comes toppling out and crouches on the floor shaking. I grab a towel, wrap him up in it, and pick him up. His kennel is already set up so I'm able to put him right in.

I hurry back inside the clinic and grab the dog food. When I get back out to the kennel the dogs all know what time it is. All of the feeding and medicine instructions are posted on a whiteboard. I glance at the board as I dish out food and medicines for each dog. They all gulp down the food in a matter of seconds, all of them but the new dog. I'm not worried though. I know that by tomorrow he'll be eating just like the others. Practically every new dog goes through this beginning stage. They all grow out of it.

With the feeding done and all of the dogs taken care of, I go back into the clinic. Before I clock out, I find Dr. Cathy and give her an update on each dog. As soon as she gives me the ok to leave, I clock out and go. I smell like wet dog and cleaning solution, and I can't wait to get home and take a shower. There is no better feeling than getting off work, I think to myself. As I drive home, though, I can't help but worry if Bobo's cancer will go away, if Captain's leg will heal right, if the virus Joey has can be treated, and if they'll ever figure out what is wrong with Annabelle. I find myself worrying about the new dog being scared and alone all night.

Sarah Beetz, *All Hail the Towel*



Photography, 8 x 10in

Last Cigarette

Ashley R. Brinkman

Outside the bar, Sean sat waiting under the streetlamp for the inevitable. Chris was drinking again and bound to be thrown out. Sean took a long drag from his cigarette.

"Sean, my main man, my homie," the slurred words were tossed out of the night club.

"Look, Chris, we gotta talk, Brother. Amy is worried sick about you," explained Sean.

"That old shrew? She's the one that drove me to drink," Chris hiccuped.

He was holding himself upright on the street lamp Sean was slumped against. While Chris was wearing nothing but a shirt and pants, Sean was bundled up in a heavy winter coat and hat. The alcohol gave Chris a false sense of warmth.

"Dude, she wouldn't have called me at two o'clock in the fucking morning to drag your ass home if she wasn't worried." Sean reasoned.

"Or because she just wants you to take me back to her lair so she can lash me with her venomous words again," Chris insisted, his alcohol breath fogged Sean's glasses.

He was always one for dramatics; Chris always believed his liberal arts education put him a step above the rest. Sean flicked his cigarette butt into the street.

"Chris, you're drunk and you need to go home before you get arrested."

"Sean, for one, I'm not drunk enough to deal with this. For two, I know what she did." Chris plopped down next to Sean.

"What did she do?" he asked, "I thought you and Amy were doing fine."

"That evil lumpish squash cheated on me." Chris stated.

The cold night air formed a sea of silence between Sean and Chris. Sean lit another cigarette and took a long drag. He had known all about Amy's affair because he was the second member.

"There's no way in hell that Amy'd cheat on you, Brother, what are you thinking?"

"I know she's getting it from someone else. She's been all weird lately. She don't want me touchin' her or nothin'."

"She could just be going through some shit, Man. You know how women can get with their hot and cold bullshit." Sean backhandedly defended Amy.

"No, Sean," Chris's voice steadied the more he spoke. "I'm telling you, Amy and you should really get a room next time you wanna bang in my living room. I mean I get it, my lady is banging, but, Dude, she was my lady."

Sean froze, the cigarette fell from his fingers. Chris knew about the affair. Knew that Sean

and Amy were bumping uglies behind his back.

"I mean, when I first walked into it, I thought, man that guy can't be Sean. Sean is my homie, my hetero life mate. He wouldn't cut me that deep. But ya did, Sean, you cut me deep." Chris continued, "You are sleeping with my WIFE!"

"Chris I didn't sleep with your wife, you know me, Brother." Sean denied the affair.

"Yeah, Sean, I thought I did." Chris held his hands under his arm pits. The cold air was seeping into his liquor-numbed brain.

"Sean, always willing to check in and make sure the dogs were ok. Sean, always willing to drive Amy to work when I couldn't. because I was pulling a double shift so we could go on that vacation this summer. Sean, always around to help at the house while I was out breaking my back at the lumber yard." Chris muttered to himself as he looked down the street.

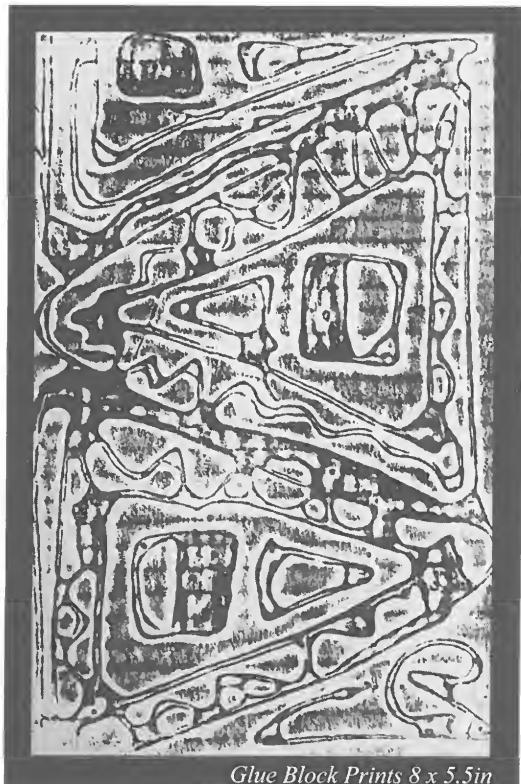
Sean continued to sit on the curb while Chris signaled a cab. As the cab pulled away, Sean lit his last cigarette.

Leann Kooi, *Entrapped*



Glue Block Prints 8 x 5.5in

Leann Kooi, *Innards*



Glue Block Prints 8 x 5.5in

Ice-Cream with the She-Beast

Ashley R. Brinkman

The old limestone walls of the church reminded me of caramel swirl ice cream from the Dairy Barn. The main hue of the stones was an off-white color, like the vanilla, and the rust or discolored parts were a rich tan color, like the caramel swirl. The outside of the church was the color of fresh-baked brownies. We go to church in an ice cream sundae, I giggled to myself. Mother shushed me and reminded me to stay quiet during the readings. Every thing in this church reminded me of food, though. Or maybe I was just hungry in general and should have been focused more on what the reader was saying.

Last Sunday mass I was so lost in my own thoughts I forgot to stand up on cue with everyone else. I didn't hear the end of it after mass. Even as we sat down for breakfast at Hardee's, my sister made jokes about me. My grandpa found my actions absolutely unacceptable.

"You are not honoring the Lord's day by daydreaming in church, Ruth," he grumbled over his coffee cup.

"Yes, Grandpa, I know. It won't happen again."

But it happened every Sunday. I would get down on the kneelers and just seemed to lose whatever focus I had. Sometimes my thoughts floated through the ideas of religion and whether God really existed. If He did, I wanted to know, was He really a man? What if God was a She and the reason we have so many natural disasters in the world is because She's upset that we puny earthlings call Her a He?

Other times I would stare off at the pillars that separated the aisles and kept the roof from caving in. The church's pillars actually contained live poplar trees according to the priest. This always led me to believe that the church itself was a living, breathing entity. That every Sunday when we would pile into this ancient house of God, we actually entered the belly of a beast. What if the church was actually a monster and regurgitated us after an hour because she didn't like the way we tasted?

"What were your special intentions during the service today, Ruthie?" My mother looked at me with overly perky eyes.

"I prayed the she-beast would spit us out before the normal hour because I was extra hungry." I smiled.

"The she-beast," Mother retorted. "Who is that?"

"Oh the church, you know, 'cause it's almost a living thing and I thought: what if it was alive?"

"Ruth, stop daydreaming and making up stories when you are supposed to be giving time to God."

When church was over, I was always the last to leave. Once everyone was regurgitated by the she-beast, I was able to see her heart. The heart of the beast was at the front of the church and was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen. It was white marble that looked as though it was covered in traces of smoke. It never moved or hummed the way a human heartbeat did, but according to Sunday school legends, the bones of a saint were solidified in the alter. Maybe that is what the she-beast needed to sustain its life, a human sacrifice.

My family didn't understand my sentiment for staying late on Sundays. I felt a life in the church that was reverent and comforting. Maybe I simply hoped to see the priest in his regular clothes and not his fancy wizard robes. Maybe I just wished to be the next human sacrifice to the she-beast. Living with the she-beast in this magical ice cream sundae wouldn't be so horrible.

Zach Fawbush, *Untitled*



Glue Block Prints 8 x 5.5in

Griffith

Jennie Weer

I first moved to Griffith when I was fourteen. However, at age nineteen, it has only been home for a few months.

Growing up on the side next to Gary, Indiana, our apartment complex was only known for crime. I was embarrassed to tell my friends I lived there, because their facial expression always changed, and they suddenly became busy when I invited them over. My younger brother, Neville, didn't mind it. He made friends with all of the kids in the neighborhood, and was referred to as Justin Bieber, or the "cool white kid."

Across the street from the complex is Luke's. Neville and I would walk there and get an Icee, or some chips. My parents never minded us walking to the gas station, as long as we were with each other. My parents were always like that. As long as we had a buddy, we could go wherever. In fact, they preferred not to drive us.

The apartment itself wasn't all bad. I shared a bedroom with two of my sisters. Neville had his own room, and my parents had a restroom with a bathtub in their room. Books took over the living room walls. Any guest's first words in our house would always be, "Wow, did I just walk into a library?" or "You guys must read a little..." Without fail, there was always some sort of comment like that. My mom was proud of her book collection. Every room was filled with as many shelves as she could neatly put in there, and there would never be any space empty on a shelf.

But while it had its perks, not all of it was great. We had three dogs that left stains on the carpet consistently. There was a problem at night with bats flying across our concrete porch. At night, we weren't supposed to walk around alone, because there was always that possibility that we would end up on the news the next day. Fights occurred on a daily basis, whether it was between siblings or parents or the neighbors we could hear through the thin walls.

I left for college when I was seventeen, and Saint Joseph's in Rensselaer became my heaven. On breaks, I dreaded going back to Griffith, and once I was there I prayed Monday would hurry.

A year later my parents bought a house, again in Griffith, but this time near Main Street. I wasn't there for any long periods of time, but breaks weren't as bad as before. Thanksgiving and Christmas didn't bring fights, and our whole family fit in the house comfortably. I celebrated my nineteenth birthday at the bowling alley a block away and we ate Taco Bell in the basement.

This past summer is when I fell in love with Griffith, Indiana. I came home from school in May and was nervous that I would miss St. Joe's too much. I had a hard time finding a job, and my

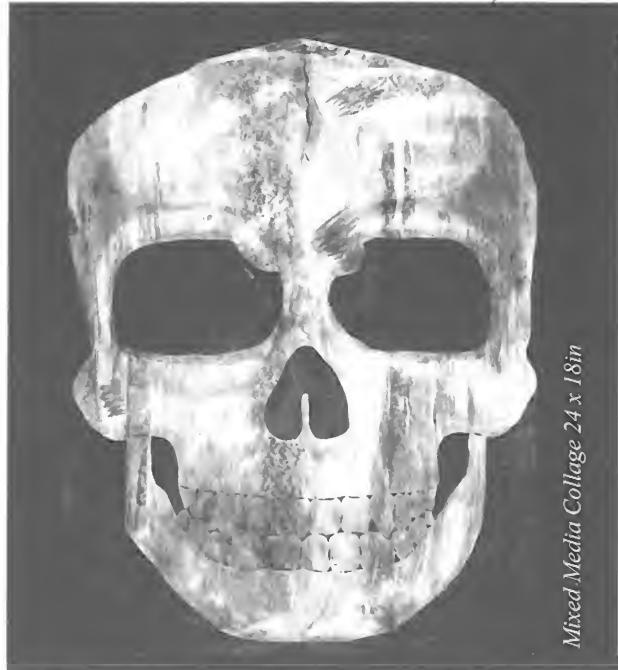
friends from high school had grown apart.

But Neville and my sister, Chloe, and I explored downtown Griffith and walked up and down Broad and Main streets. I had a gym membership to the YMCA, which was conveniently located about a minute's walk from our house. I found a café that served vegetarian food and found poetry from my oldest brother there, who I hadn't seen in three years. In the other direction is Central Park, across from St. Mary's church, whose bells woke me each morning.

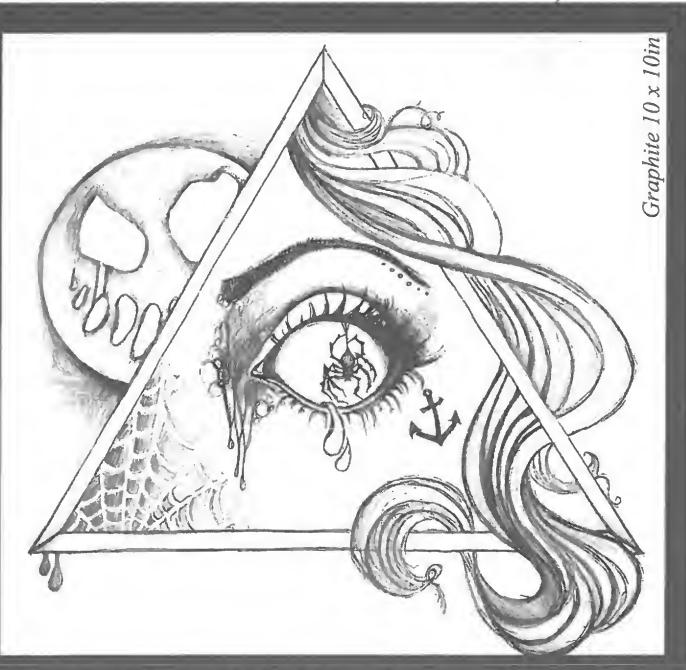
At the end of July, as I was getting ready to move back to my dorm and endure new responsibilities, I asked Neville to go on one of our usual walks with me. Our first stop was 7-11, where I bought a pack of cigarettes. Then we moved on to Central Park, and at least three cars rolled down their windows and yelled my brother's name. We sat on top of the tank in the park. I looked out at Broad Street, the pub, the houses for sale. I saw the café turn its open sign around and dim its lights. A police car passed, going the exact speed posted.

For the first time in three years, I didn't want to go back to school. For the first time in my life, I didn't mind the thought of staying home, coming back and sitting on a tank with my brother, smoking until I became dizzy and until the music from the bar died down.

Joe Haberlin, *Skull*



Nicole B. Thomsen, *Lumanti*



Wishes

Jennie Weer

Remember that night you bought me a McDonald's smoothie,
The blueberry kind,
And you got yourself a chocolate shake?
We brought them and a big blanket out to the soccer field,
In the back where there weren't lights
Or people to see what we were doing.
We folded the blanket in half,
Snuggled between the layers,
And I sipped my smoothie
And shivered as the breeze touched my toes.
You downloaded an app on your phone,
Where you hold it up to the sky
And it shows you which constellations should be up there.
Do you remember the shooting stars we saw?
Two, right in a row,
And it was magical.
Typically one wishes on these stars,
But I don't remember wishing for anything
Because I was so content with how things were.
Just like I didn't wish on my 19th birthday cake,
Because my love for you
And yours for me
Satisfied me beyond belief.
I guess if I could go back
I would have wished twice for things to be that way forever.
I think you made a wish that night,
Right after we saw those stars,
But you never told me what it was
Because you were scared it wouldn't come true.
Whatever it was,
I hope it happened,
And I hope you got everything you wanted out of life.

Our Color

Jennie Weer

I try to think of a color that comes to mind whenever his name is said.
Maybe it's grey, because sadness has loomed over me the past six months.

Is it white, because I don't know where he is or if he can hear me?
Perhaps it's red, because the nights I think too much of him, it is the color that spills.

Maybe his color is yellow, because he loved warmly, and cared deeply.
Or maybe it is black, because depression has never crept inside me as much as it has now.

No, I know exactly what color he is.
He's the color I wear the most.
The color of the ocean we swam through,
The color of the stones on the ring he gave me.
He's my father's eyes,
The clear sky,
His favorite color and mine.
We're blue.



Patience Keen, For My Mother, Amphora
Stoneware & Black Slip, 15h x 15w x 15d

Something in Common

Jennie Weer

I sat on the steps in front of my house
tonight.

Camel Crush cigarette in one hand,
My chin in the other.

My days were full of 8 hours of work,
And nights of catching up with friends
Who I won't see when I move back to
school.

So much going on in life.

Then, as I flicked at the ashes,
I noticed the soft blinking of a
lightning bug

In the middle of the grass.

Not flying

Or making some child's night by
being held captive for a couple
hours.

Maybe he's depressed, too.



Nicole Bradie Thomsen, *Uptown Tracks Underpass*
Photography, 12in x 12in

What If?

Tabitha Blaisdell

I tend to become absorbed with possibilities other people find absurd. For example, what if the telephone rings while you are standing naked after a shower? What if that call is the job of your dreams and after it gets sent to voicemail, it's offered to the next candidate in line? Now your whole life has to be rearranged, all because you decided to take a shower at that exact moment and you feared running after the phone naked.

What if that random noise you heard late in the night isn't something the cat knocked down but instead a serial killer who's going to chase you around the house and brutally murder you? That will teach you for not being able to distinguish your own cat's disasters from a dangerous intruder. What if you go to the dentist for a simple procedure, but the Novocaine never wears off? The dentist said it would only be an hour or two, but you still can't feel your face.

What if your alarm doesn't go off and the class you end up missing offers an in-class assignment that's worth half of your grade? You're the only one to blame for clicking snooze one too many times.

What if you're going on about your day and you happen to get stuck on an elevator? Your pure laziness and refusal to take the stairs might result in you being late for something important or even worse, your unfortunate death.

What if while curiously observing a storm outside, you happen to be one out of a billion people who gets struck by lightning? Nature isn't so beautiful now, is it?

What if you wake up from a nightmare only to fully realize that the nightmare was actually reality and therefore has truly just begun?

What if that breaking of a mirror, the stepping on sidewalk cracks or having a black cat cross your path causes a series of bad luck? Maybe if you played it safe, paid more attention to these superstitions, you wouldn't be so unlucky.

These thoughts may seem irrational and most of them probably are, but it is the neverending game of "what ifs" that plagues an anxious over thinker (or one who's watched too many dateline shows and horror movies). These "what if" questions have no answers, just more questions. The only way to answer them is to try not to.

Sunday

Tabitha Blaisdell

We used to meet on Sundays. I thought it was sweet that you wanted to spend your Sundays with me. Before you, I spent my Sundays alone, relaxing at home and catching up on all the TV shows I had missed during the week. My Sundays were always the same, spent in the same place, doing the same thing, but you changed that for me. It all started when we began seeing each other less and less. Our weeks were busy and our schedules always conflicted. We lived in the same city no more than 5 miles apart, but somehow we had skipped to two weeks since we last saw each other. I missed you terribly and you said you missed me too.

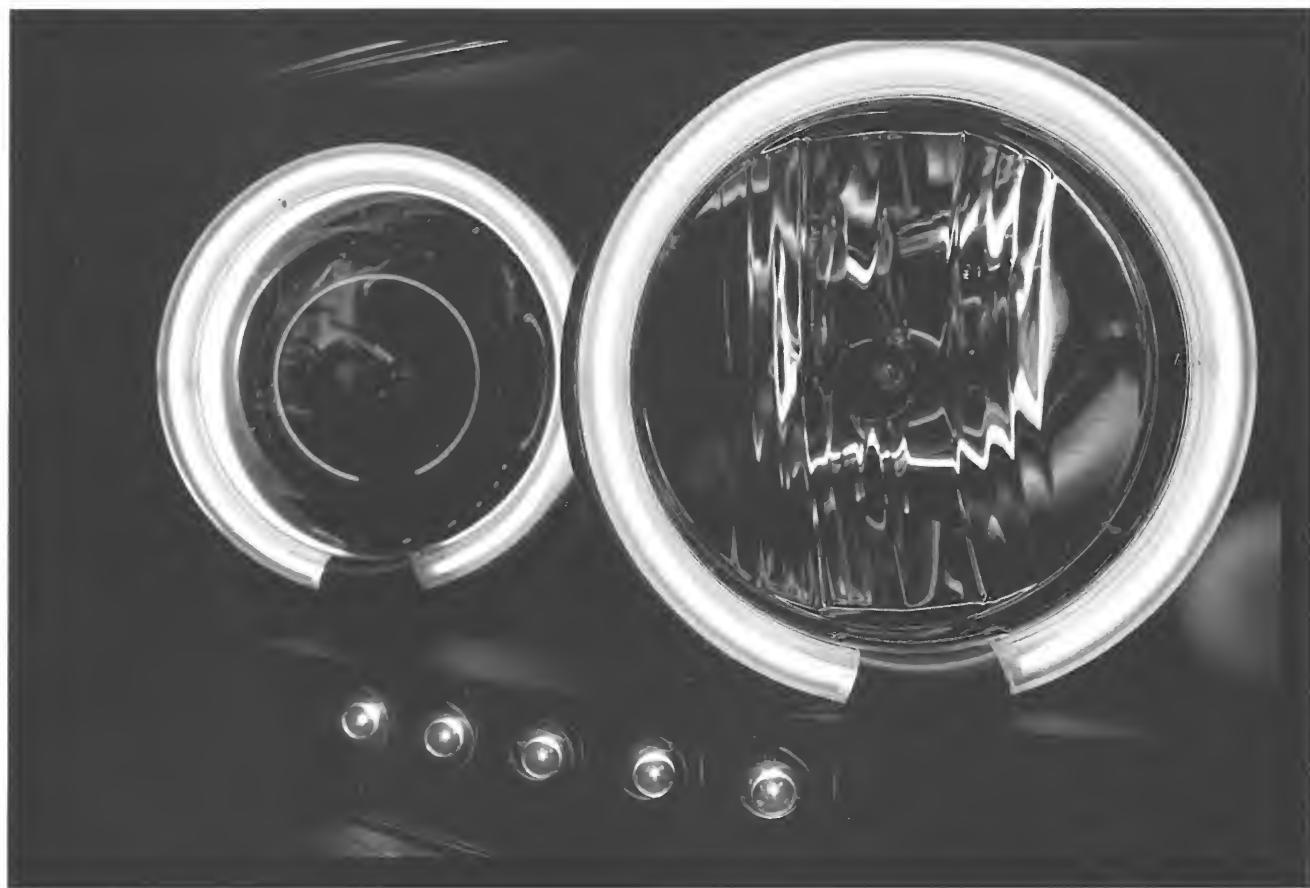
I remember that warm Sunday during the first week of June, when out of the blue you asked to see me. I was surprised by your suggestion, as we never spent Sunday together before. I admit, I was also a little bit hesitant to give up my Sunday, my only quiet day, but seeing you meant more than taking that time for myself. I remember how happy I felt after I saw you that Sunday. When I came home later that night, I fell asleep with loving thoughts of you parading through my mind and the next morning I woke up in such a pleasant mood. Seeing you on Sunday set the perfect tone for my week, and it wasn't long before I gave up all my quiet Sundays to see you.

I always spent my weekdays looking forward to our Sunday reunions. Sunday became our day and I was happy with it at first. I played the role of the understanding girlfriend quite well. I understood that you were tired from your unsteady Monday through Friday night shifts. I romanticized the fact that I only saw you on Sundays, going as far as telling myself that seeing you less just made our time together more special. And it's true, the Sundays we spent together were quite special to me. I loved nothing more than lying in the castle of your arms. But as my family and friends began to question how little time we spent together, I spent more time questioning it myself. I'd ask you why I couldn't see you on Saturday, and you'd always have plans to do something else. Then I'd offer to stay up to see you for even a short amount of time after work, but you'd always be too tired. That's when I grew tired myself, tired of only seeing you on Sundays, tired of feeling unappreciated and tired of questioning every aspect of our relationship. Our traditional Sunday meetings were no longer romantic like they used to be. They were just you squeezing me into your schedule, not caring to make time to see me because you knew I'd always somehow make time to see you.

Now I'm back to spending my Sundays alone, trying to make myself feel okay with having a quiet Sunday, without you by my side. I used to love how I spent my Sundays, but you changed that

for me and my mind isn't finding it easy to shift back into my old routine. I can't stop thinking about how we spent our Sundays together, some days we were content with the silence as we laid together watching a movie on your couch and other times we'd drive around the city and lose track of time as we talked about our lives. I miss our Sundays together, but I know now that I should have never sacrificed my Sundays for you, when Sundays were all you were willing to give me.

Casey Snow, *Untitled*
Digital Photography, 10in x 14in



Lauren Elizabeth Fernandez, Raven's Nest
Prisma Drawing, 18in x 24in



Out of the Book: Gabe's Story

Regina Warfel

Gabe was always in a happy go lucky mood as he went to the public library. The library was his favorite place to be. He loved the smell of the old leather books, or the new jacket smell as he walked through the door. He loved the bright colorful jackets with the different sizes, 8, 10, 12, 14 and 18 points, and types of print, fonts of Courier, Old English, block letters, all caps. Gabe relished each kind of type. He stroked the old books with reverence as he ran his hand over the embossed print and marveled how they were printed years ago. "Hi, old friends. It is good to see you again. Which you of you shall I start with today?" He also loved the glossy new covers with all the pictures on them. Oh, how he wished he could live in the library. His Dad bought him a Kindle for this birthday, but he had not opened it yet. Gage preferred the feel of pages. He was afraid to try the new electronic gadget because it did not feel right, not like his friends, the books with real pages.

Books drew Gabe into their very souls, if books could have souls. As far as Gabe was concerned, each book became his friend as he perused the pages and almost jumped into the book to become one with the book. Captain Ahab and Gabe talked about catching Moby Dick. Gabe became the cabin boy in *Treasure Island*. *The Hardy Boys* books drew Gabe into one or the other of the cases, Gabe helping to solve the mystery. As Nailer in *The Ship Breaker*, Gabe stripped cooper wiring, but had a tough time deciding what to do when he found the clipper ship. Of course, Gabe almost always became Harry Potter, only once seeming to transform into Hermione. No matter what the context of the book, Gabe could identify with the characters. Gabe wished that he could live in some of his books. He had trouble identifying with real people and trying to talk with him. Unlike his book friends, real people, that is other students, said, "Here comes Gabe. He sure is a weirdo." Or "Look there is that nerd Gabe or bookworm Gabe. He talks to books. He doesn't know who won the NFL championship because he doesn't watch football." The other students did not want to talk with him because he could not relate to the things they knew best, computer games, hockey, football, and basketball. Therefore, books became Gabe's only friends. At least he felt comfortable with the books and the characters that he became or conversed with. Gabe was book smart and could recite many great authors like Leo Tolstoy, Khaled Hosseini, Suzanne Collins, or Jeff Kinney. He could talk as if he was a part of the war, feel Amir's pain, understand Peeta desire to help Katniss win, or feel like a wimpy kid. Gabe was knowledgeable about historical events, for example, the years that wars were held and who their generals were, along with using the correct grammar when he spoke

or wrote. "If I could talk computer games or know the basketball players like I do my Generals, maybe other students would talk to me. But, I guess it is no use, I don't know who Michael Jordan played for, I think he is in basketball." Gabe often role-played with characters he read in his books, even to the point of talking out loud in the library. "I like your sword, Blackbeard. Will you teach me how to use it? I will need to know the next time I'm on a pirate ship." "Well, mately, ye be a bit young, but me cabin boys knows how. So, ye take the cutlass in your right hand, no turn it around. Aargh, ye got the right hold, now parry, lunge at me" Blackbeard instructs. That is why he always chose the back corner of the library, where there was more privacy and room to speak with his book characters. Gabe knew how to talk properly for the different eras and could easily converse with his characters in the language of their day. However, when it came to a real person, Gabe didn't know how to act. "Hey, Gabo Wierdo what you doing?" asked one of the cool kids. Gabe stammered, "Oh, oh, just, well.....aaaa." "Speak up, I can't understand you. My dog talks to me better than you do. One more time, whats up?" In these situations, Gabe would freeze, his palms would get sweaty, his tongue would get tied in knots, he would open his mouth, and nothing would come out. Then he would just squeak, "Class .. go." No matter what Gabe would try to say, the other student would just laugh and walk away. After a time, students gave up talking to Gabe, and he gave up talking to them.

One day in the library, the library aide heard two people quietly talking in the back corner. Since the aide was putting away books, he decided to see who was talking. He knew that Gabe sat back there and that no one talked to him. After making fun of Gabe when he came into the library, the other students left him alone in his corner. As the aide stealthy went toward the back wall and looked around the corner of the bookshelf, he was so shocked at what he saw that he dropped his books. He saw Gabe talking to a Civil War general. Where had that guy come from? Was that really Gabe talking to this guy? The aide cleared his throat and asked "Who you talking to Gabe? I didn't see this guy come in. You should know that swords are not allowed in the library." Just as Gabe turned toward the student aide, and opened his mouth to squeak out, "No one," a deep voice spoke. "Identify yourself, Rebel or Yankee? Prepare to fight if you give the wrong answer," the general spoke. The aide couldn't speak now. The general drew his sword and advanced toward the aide. "I'm sure you are a Yankee since you didn't answer. Prepare to fight, lad." Gabe wished the books would swallow him up. "General, please this is not the time. He is not your enemy. You are only one person and cannot fight the company of many that he has beyond the wall. I think it would be in your best interest to retreat General to fight another day when you have the whole company with you and you are not behind enemy lines," snapped Gabe. "You're right. I will retreat and regroup

with my company. I got what I needed on this reconnaissance trip anyway. Later, Lieutenant," agreed the general. The aide didn't wait to see what would happen he ran and shouted, "Help, he's coming after me with a sword! Help, I think he is going to kill me!" Unfortunately, everyone, including the shushing librarian, came running to Gabe's corner. When they got there, Gabe was quietly reading his book. Gabe turned to the librarian as she asked in her most authoritative voice after running, "Gabe, (pant, pant) what is going on? Where is the man with the sword? (pant, pant)." "Mman, what man?" Gabe innocently asked in a very quiet, library voice. The librarian, aide, and other students looked around and found no one. The librarian said, "Sorry to have bothered you, Gabe. Continue your reading. What are you reading? Oh, about the Civil War. Everyone back to what you were doing. Scott, we really must talk about not pulling practical jokes in the library." The librarian took the aid by the arm and pulled him away. "But I saw him, I really saw the guy in the uniform and sword. He threatened me with the sword. I'm not lying. Honest. Why don't you believe me? Ask Gabe, he'll tell you. Tell her Gabe," pleaded the aide. Several students laughed and were shushed by the librarian. "Gabe wouldn't say anything anyway. He can't talk or won't talk. You just thought you saw someone," said a student laughingly.

"General that was a close call. Glad you retreated when you did. You would have been captured. Next time, if there is a next time, do not unsheathe your sword," whispered Gabe. A muffled voice said, "Good job Lieutenant." Gabe put the book back on the shelf until another day. He was ready to go home. That was too close of a call. Next time he would get a more modern book without swords. "Friends, I'll be back tomorrow. No pirates or general for a while. I'm afraid that Scott or others will watch us. Harry, I won't take you down either for a short time because last time Hagrid's dragon almost burned the bookshelf." Faintly, voices were heard, "Bye Gabe. Don't forget us. Hope he picks me next. I haven't been out in quite some time."

Quest Complete

Josh D. Alengo

“If he doesn’t want to spend time with both you and your cousin, then he isn’t worth your time,” Annette told him.

“But he’s my friend, and it just doesn’t seem fair to stop talking to him just because he doesn’t like Linus.”

“Listen, Ryan, and really listen this time, because I’ve told you a hundred times before. Throughout your life, friends will come and go, but your family is forever. Linus loves you and it would just be plain rude for you to cast him aside just because you’d rather spend time with this Arnold guy. If he doesn’t like Linus, then he’s a bad influence; it’s as simple as that.”

“I like talking to Arnie about stuff, though. He’s the only one that I can talk to about plays. Nobody else I know likes theater, but Arnie loves it more than anything.”

“Trust me, you’ll survive without plays. It’s not like plays are going to help get you into law school. And if you don’t get into law school, you won’t be a lawyer and you’ll never be able to make your grandfather proud. He worked every day of his life to start the law practice that keeps a roof over your head, you know. Your father was a lawyer and I’m a lawyer, and even your uncle tried going to law school. He dropped out, though, and now he lives in his crummy apartment. Is that what you want for yourself?”

“My dad walked out when I was three. Why should I be like him?”

“Because walking out or not, he’s an accomplished attorney. He’s successful and could probably teach you a thing or two about responsibility.”

“Responsibility!? But he walk—“

The conversation was over. Ryan knew it. His aunt was too stubborn and would never be open minded enough to let him sway her otherwise. They’d had similar conversations before and they all ended the same way: Annette was right and he was wrong. It was almost a law of nature at this point. While turning to run upstairs to his room, Annette stopped him, “Ryan.” He reluctantly turned to face her.

“I love you, honey.”

“...Love you too,” he squeaked before resuming his ascension.

Once he was safely at his desk, nestled cozily in the corner of his bedroom and out of the brutal late afternoon rays of the sun through the window threatening to bake his bed, he powered on the computer and fired up his current favorite game, Endless Quest. EQ was a traditional RPG filled with dungeons, monsters, a levelling system, loot, and, of course, quests. In this familiar world, Ryan

took on the role of a fierce warrior specializing in two-handed blunt weapons like maces, flails, and mallets. He wore shining steel armor and tore through dungeons like wet tissue paper. On this day he was beginning a new quest zone, with new monsters to match his level, which he increased recently making the old quest zone obsolete.

He immediately began seeking out NPCs, non-player characters, to accept quests from. The first one he spoke with had a high-level quest that described a merciless dungeon that ended in a treasure room guarded by a fierce demon. It sounded out of his league, but the thought of completing it excited him. He left the quest in his log and found others he'd be capable of doing right now and alone.

The idea of a "quest" excited Ryan. Some helpless person would task you with helping them solve some problem, like rats in the basement or kobolds stealing crops, and you'd heroically step in and improve their life with nothing but a weapon and your wits. It wasn't the combat that truly engaged him, though. It was the payoff. Once a quest was complete, you'd run on back to the original questgiver and they'd express their undying gratitude and grant you a reward of some kind. It was exhilarating, it was satisfying, and, most of all, it was validating. Validation is all he really wanted from the game; somebody to say "you did great, Kid. Keep up the good work!" Low self-esteem had that sort of effect on you. If you don't see value in yourself, it's because you can't find anything within you of any value. But when somebody else sees value that you overlooked, it was euphoric, it was reinforcing, and it was undeniable the best feeling in the world for Ryan.

Later that night, Annette called him down for dinner. Linus had gotten home right on time and didn't have a chance to run upstairs to see his older cousin before Annette called for him.

"How was basketball?" Ryan asked him.

"It was fun, but the coach just ruins it."

Annette's interest was piqued, "What's the problem with Coach Summers?"

"It's not that big a deal, he just wouldn't let us use the bathroom until we all did laps 'cause Greg talked back to him."

"He made you all run laps because of some other kid!?"

"Well, yeah, lots of coaches do that," Linus explained.

"But he wouldn't even let you use the bathroom!?"

"Not until we all ran the laps, but it's not like—"

"No, Linus! That isn't acceptable! I'm going to talk to him myself, right now. That's bullshit!" she shouted as she stormed out the door into the garage. The two heard her car start and saw the headlights leave the driveway. Linus dropped his head with a sigh, and he still towered over Ryan like a redwood. They were both still sitting at the table, so they simply started eating and chatting. Within twenty minutes she was back and angrier than when she had left.

"The nerve of some people! He doesn't even care that you're only in high school! This isn't the NBA!"

Linus cringed and tried to calm her down, "Yeah, but you have to be ready for the NBA if you want to get drafted, Mom."

"That doesn't matter, Linus. You'll be ready when you need to be for whatever it is you decide to do with your life."

"Not if nobody prepares me," Linus argued.

"You're only fifteen, you don't know what you're talking about!"

Linus was verbally cornered and struggled to come up with a response.

Ryan spoke, "Just listen to Annette, Linus. She's your mom." He immediately realized the argument was none of his business and that he shouldn't have said a word. He winced and braced for a scolding.

Both turned to look at him, a bit stunned. Their amazement changed, to anger for Linus and to pride for Annette.

"Dude—" Linus began.

"Yeah! Tell 'im, Ryan! See, Linus? Your cousin is smart. Listen to him."

Blown away by Annette's reaction, Ryan could only stare blankly at them. Every part of him froze up while his mind struggled to process this development. After a moment or two, his brain booted back up and a realization was made. A wave of endorphins flooded his being and a feeling of satisfaction erupted through his veins. He saw the pride in his aunt's face. He had never had anyone proud of him before. The feeling was cathartic. A tinge of regret pierced him from his cousin, but it was overshadowed entirely by this fantastic feeling. Ryan smiled.

"I was just trying to explain that—" Linus stammered.

Annette interrupted, "I love you, Linus, and I just want you to be happy. I'm doing what's best for you and you have to trust me. I'm your mother, after all."

"...Okay, Mom," Linus said, finally giving up.

The next day, Ryan ate breakfast alone. Linus had to be at school early for a basketball meeting and Annette was to drop him off. With them out of the house, he was the only one home. He toasted a bagel and spread it with cream cheese and sat down to nibble on it while he checked his laptop. The high school had tons of money in a computer science department that reciprocated the school by producing an entirely student-created website. Ryan checked it regularly for the daily lunch menus, upcoming events, sports highlights, and other school-related news.

News was beyond bland. Nothing was going on. His eyes skimmed up and down the pages of upcoming events, digging for something interesting. The soccer team will be playing an away game at Calumet High. After getting her job back, recently fired lunch lady Bernice has been fired again

for stealing food from the kitchen. Principle Yeats' granddaughter has been released from the hospital after a mild strep-related scare. None of it concerned him in the least, until he got to page three. Two new clubs were having callouts: the mock trial team and drama club.

His heart beat a bit faster and he read the words aloud to himself, "the drama club and—" The door connecting the garage to the house opened and shut without Ryan even noticing, "—the mock trial team will be holding callouts today and tomorrow, open to all interested students."

"You're gonna join the mock trial team!?" Annette asked with excitement.

Ryan nearly leapt out his seat, his previously accelerated heart rate now jumping through the roof,

"I...I don't know, I was just reading about—"

"Oh, I'm so excited! You're gonna love mock trial, I know it!"

"I haven't really decided on anythi—"

"I'm so proud of you, Ryan. It's like I told you before: you have to think about your dreams every day. When you wake up in the morning and when you go to sleep at night, you need to be thinking about what it is you truly love and what you want to do every day for the rest of your life. That's how dreams come true, you have to really want it," Annette explained.

Ryan felt confused. There was a weight in the pit of his stomach, as though he'd swallowed a medicine ball, but those words... "I'm so proud of you." He'd never heard her say that to him in his life. The feelings were overwhelming. Ryan originally had no intention of joining mock trial. Annette was proud, though. Sparks flew as the good and bad feelings duked it out in the core of his mind. The weight in his stomach became nausea, and suddenly the bagel seemed like an awful idea.

"Can we go, now? I wanted to get to school early to talk to my algebra teacher," he lied, growing desperate to end the encounter.

"Now you're showing up early to secure those good grades. I don't know what happened, but it seems like you're really turning things around this semester. I always knew you'd find the drive to succeed eventually. The car is probably still warm, go put your coat on."

All that day he thought about mock trial. He concluded he didn't want to go. At all. So at the end of the day, when three o'clock rolled around, he packed up his bag at his locker, sealed the rest behind the lock, and headed toward the door...to the mock trial call-outs.

With a heavy sigh, he trudged into the half-filled classroom full of perky wannabe lawyers and attorneys, all high school students that seemed to share a love for arguing and self-affirmation. They were also taller than Ryan, every one of them. He cursed the coincidence and found a seat in the back.

A particularly tall and well-dressed boy stood in the front of the room and introduced himself as captain and coordinator of the mock trial team. He laid out rules of conduct for club members and described the format of the mock trials. None of what he had to say was particularly interesting to

Ryan, but he listened all the same. Annette was proud of him, after all.

"So, to finish today, I thought it would be a good ice-breaking exercise if we did a little skill-building activity. Line up the desks in two rows, facing each other." Everyone in the room rose and began shifting the desks. Within a minute, everything was set as he described. "Perfect. I want new recruits in this row, and returning members will take this other row. Now, each returning member has been given an issue on a slip of paper. The newbies will not move, but every two minutes I'll ring this bell and the veterans will shift one desk down the line and argue their issue with you. They will pick the side of the issue they are arguing, and you must assume an opposing position. I'll be supervising and observing your argument abilities. Are there any questions?"

No hands moved, no lips flapped.

"Great. Begin when I sound the bell, here."

Across from Ryan was a particularly large upper classman with a confident smile and an aggressive handshake. He introduced himself and Ryan reciprocated in kind.

Ding!

The vet burst right into action: "American presence in Middle Eastern countries is deplorable! The federal government has the statistics in its hands. They know the citizens are sick of wars in deserts with extremists, and everyone wants their friends and family home safe where they belong! The economy is in the pits and we need those men here to help us help ourselves. We came out of that recession a few years back, but we'll be right back in if we don't stop spending all this money on the military and get those bright young minds back here, helping society improve!"

There was a long pause. He was waiting for Ryan's response. Ryan looked around. There was always a pause between argument and counter argument, but it was time necessary for the newbies to come up with a few points to make, a few points to disprove, and so on and so on. Ryan was, once again, overwhelmed. He dug through his mind for a strong counter opinion, even a fake one would've worked, but found nothing. "I don't think..."

"Well?" the boy asked, "Why do you think we should stay in the Middle East?"

"I'm not the right person to really...I just, I think you should really ask somebody...." Ryan simply trailed off. The boy looked at him funny and seemed to be thinking about something.

Finally he said "You really aren't cut—"

Ding!

Literally saved by the bell, Ryan sighed in relief. The boy moved on desk down, and his seat was taken by a new aspiring law student. The next conversation went pretty much the same way: "Abortion is awful! The audacity it takes to kill something beneath even a newborn is astoundingly atrocious, and we cannot allow people to carry this heinous act through to completion, especially in special clinics! You might as well call them Baby-Killing Centers! It's just intolerable! If we don't

allow people to kill old people on life support, then why allow people to kill new babies? It makes no sense!"

The long pause.

"You know, I don't think it's really our business to decide...like, maybe we should just let people...I'm not sure it's right to...." Then the trailing off. Confusion in the vet's face.

Ding!

This process repeated itself over and over and over again. Each new face brought with it a strong opinion backed by what they felt were "facts," and each time Ryan had no strong opinion otherwise. The last bell went off and the twelfth or so mock trial veteran slumped off underwhelmed by his performance. The meeting was ended and people began shuffling out. Toward the back of the pack being herded through the sole doorway, Ryan was pulled aside by the leader of the team.

"Ryan, right? Com'ere a second." He physically tugged Ryan from the crowd. "Why are you here?"

Ryan stared back silently.

"Because it doesn't look like you really care about this sort of thing."

Ryan had no answer. He looked around nervously.

"Look man, all I'm trying to say is that if you don't really give a shit about mock trial, don't make us waste our time with you. I know it sounds harsh, but imagine if I let you join the team and we do some sort of event with another school. They'll know you don't care, and how will that make us look?"

Ryan gulped, beginning to sweat.

"Just go home and think about it, and if you really think this is for you then you can come back and have some fun. If you do, just make sure you tighten up your big boy pants and be ready to argue and present a case. Nobody wants a timid lawyer."

He waved Ryan away and turned to his things behind the teacher's desk in the room. Ryan made his way outside to wait for Annette to pick him up.

"So? How'd it go!?" Annette was dying to know.

"It was a ton of fun," Ryan lied.

She couldn't take the joy, she squealed with excitement, "Ooooooh, I knew you'd just love it! This is your first step, Ryan. Soon enough, you'll be going to work every day in your own law firm! You'll be such a great lawyer!"

The car sped on through the middle of town. They passed by an old lady tugging on an old dog that just wouldn't budge. They stopped at an intersection right next to the lady and her dog. Annette didn't seem to notice them.

"You'll start in the family firm and slowly your uncle will teach you all the little details, like

financing and stuff. Before you know it, the business thing will be in your name and you'll run the whole thing! Everything is set for you already, Ryan. You are literally walking out of school and into success. The hard work has been done for you. All you have to do, now, is want it enough.

Ryan fought back tears.

That night, Ryan sat down to play Endless Quest. He logged into the game and walked his warrior to the quest hub, the town where all the quest-giving NPCs walked around waiting for heroic adventurers to offer them aid. The day before, he had been working on a quest on the opposite side of the region and it took him nearly fifteen minutes just to get back to town. He had finished his quest, and was excited to return to the NPC he received it from to give him the good news and reap his reward.

When he got to town, though, there had been a raid. Endless Quest had two opposing factions that players sided with. Occasionally, players of the opposite faction would group up and attack a town or village. This was known as a raid, and had been the fate of the little village he had been working out of. Strewn about the cobblestone paths and lying in front of farmhouses were the digital corpses of every questgiver in town. Not a single one remained.

Questgivers had a twenty-four hour respawn rate, so they'd be back eventually but not for an entire day. Ryan had nothing else to do that night. He wanted to play Endless Quest. He was near levelling up again, he couldn't quit now. But he didn't know what to do. He stood there in the center of town, clueless. What was he supposed to do without a questgiver to appease? Wasn't that what the game was about? Ryan thought it was, and was left utterly frozen.

A chat window opened up in the bottom left corner of his screen:

“Big raid huh?”

Ryan rarely chatted with other players, but he was broken out of his mild daze, so he hit <r> (reply) and began typing, “Looks like it. I had quests to turn in too.”

“Ouch, Bummer. looks Like you won't be able to turn anything in until tomorrow, so you wanna help me out in a cave nearby? I've been struggling to do it alone. i'll split loot with you, promise.”

“Where did you get a quest for a cave?”

“I dont have a quest”

“Then why are you there?”

“Lol, you dont need a quest to go where you want. i just like explorin n stuff. its super fun in there”

Ryan was confused, “You just like to do it?”

“Well ya its a game. its sposed to be fun”

Without any more hesitation, Ryan agreed to join him and had the most fun he had ever had

playing Endless Quest, without ever touching an actual quest. Never had he explored the landscape unguided. Never had he experienced the game without the game itself holding his hand through the content. That night he played far later than usual and struggled to peel himself from the screen as the clock struck midnight, then one AM. Before two, though, he found himself nodding off and told his new friend he had to go.

Annette was late. Her car was nowhere to be seen as Ryan shivered in the cold winter wind outside the front door of the high school. He considered going back inside to watch Linus practice with the rest of the basketball team, but reconsidered. He didn't get along well with the basketball players.

After nearly half an hour, a black SUV Ryan hadn't even noticed pull up came to a complete stop and unloaded its driver: Annette's ex-husband, Greg. Greg was rarely around aside from his court-ordered one-weekend-a-month he had to spend with temporary custody of Linus. This wasn't a Friday, and it wasn't even the right week that month for Greg to be around.

"Hey, Ryan. Annette...couldn't pick you up. Get in the car and I'll...tell you about it."

They hopped in the car and strapped on seatbelts. Greg began driving and didn't speak. Ryan didn't care much for the guy, so he was just fine with the silence. He traced the path Annette normally took when she drove home with the boys in tow, only Greg messed up. He missed the turn onto their subdivision.

"You missed it," Ryan pointed out.

Greg sighed, "Ryan, we have to go to the hospital. I'm going to drop you off and then I'll have just enough time to go back to the school and get Linus. I want him to finish practice, so his day is as normal as possible."

"What's going on? What are you talking about?"

"I didn't want to have to be the one to tell you. You already lost your mother in a car accident, you don't need this."

Ryan was silent. Expectant.

"There was an accident on Annette's way to work."

His pupils dilated and he felt he swallowed another lead weight.

"The road was icy and someone pulled out in front of her."

His eyes welled up. He held back tears.

"She couldn't stop in time. The guy was driving a semi and didn't stop at the stop sign."

He noticed his chest was heaving with strained breaths.

"Annette was pronounced dead about two hours ago."

It was a long car ride.

Later that month, Linus and Ryan sat on the porch behind Greg's home about five towns

away, where they were living until other arrangements could be made, which seemed less and less likely every day.

“Are you going to join the basketball team next year?” Ryan asked his cousin.

“I don’t know. It’s hard. I don’t know any of these kids. I’m still thinkin’ about it. What about you?”

“I’ll probably join mock trial again.”

“You hate mock trial.”

“How do you know?”

“Ryan, you never had to join in the first place.”

“I know, I wanted to, though.”

“No, my mom wanted you to.”

“I just wanted to make her happy.”

“Yeah, but...she doesn’t matter, now.” Linus was crying.

“Of course she matters...she’s your mom.”

“Not anymore she doesn’t.”

“Linus...”

“Grow up, Ryan! It’s time to stop acting like kids! You’re a year older than me, you’re supposed to be more mature!”

“I don’t want to argue, Linus.”

Casey Snow, *Use the Photography to See Yourself*
Digital Photography, 10in x 14in



I'm Tired of Poetry

Charles Kerlin

All it's ever about is death.

Look at Frost's, "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening"

And its "miles to go before I sleep."

Taken a poetry class?

You know "sleep" means "death."

Prufrock worries about getting old

And "wearing the bottom of his trousers rolled."

Why?

'Cause he's afraid of dying,

Which might just be a good thing for him

Since he's such a pathetic, old fool.

But that's another poetry class discussion.

Hamlet says it right out: "To be or not to be"

Means he's thinking about death.

"To His Coy Mistress" is about death and screwing around

While there's still time.

Because, as it says,

"At my back I always hear time's winged chariot hurrying near."

"Because I could not stop for death, he kindly stopped for me," says old Emily.

She reveled in death.

The list goes on.

I'm tired of it.

I want to read some good juicy prose about

Foolin' around,

Overeating and drinking,

Traveling to Spain for the running of the bulls.

I know pieces in prose about all of that,

But do you know what?

After the screwing around

And the overeating and drinking

And the running of the bulls,

There's death.

'Cause, as my favorite poem says in song,

"The days grow short when you reach September"

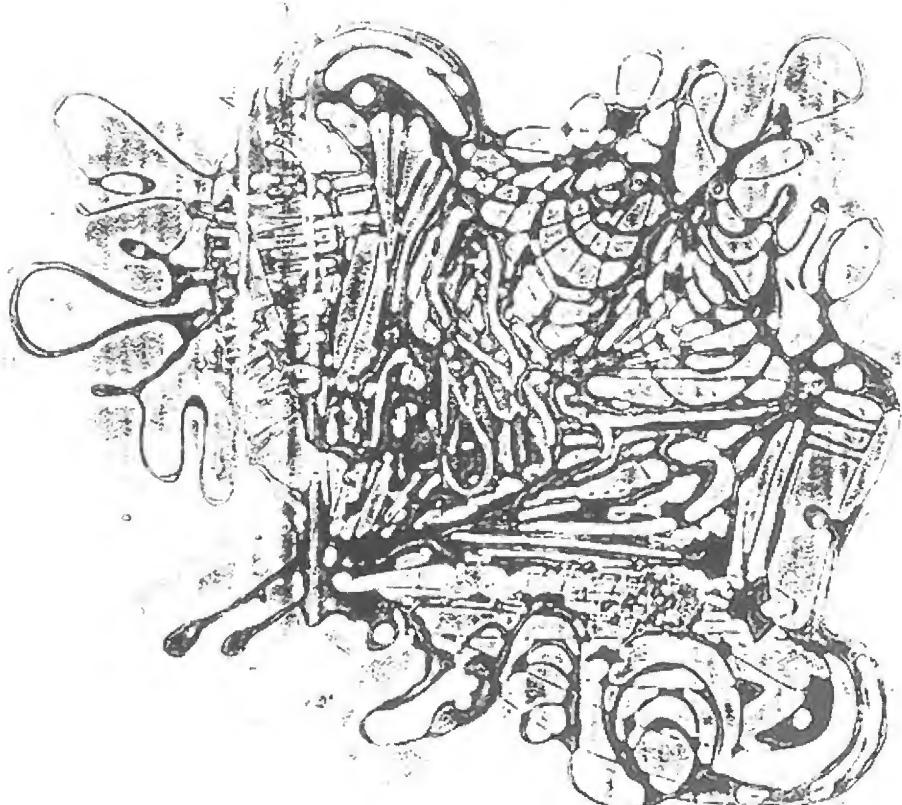
That's where you are.

"October, November"

That's where I am.

"And these few precious days, I'll spend with you,

These precious days, I'll spend with you."



Nicole Bradie Thomsen,

Line Work Doe'

Black Ink Print, 16in x 20in

And One Fine Morning

Charles Kerlin

On the first night of spring or thereabouts, looking out my dining room window I noticed a full moon rising in the east, lighting my yard and making it appear much lovelier than it had seemed that day. This year has been cold; one of the coldest according to the *Chicago Tribune*.

I went outside and stood on the small deck on the south side of my house. I went out to take a pee, something I do, I've decided, to establish ownership of my land or, at least, to show that I have enough land to do so without raising a fuss with my neighbor who lives behind me and is, after all, the mayor.

Standing there, I saw the moon's light illuminating the pale green grass that was just starting to grow. Looking across my yard, I saw how it brightened the white buds of a plum tree that had just begun to bloom. Seeing these things and aware of the moon still rising over my left shoulder, I was struck with the most intense sense of wonder.

Fitzgerald captured my feeling of wonder of the beauty of the natural world at the end of *The Great Gatsby*. You remember the passage, don't you? He is imagining how this new world must have looked to the first Dutch sailors who saw our continent "—a fresh, green breast of the new world" which must have given each of them "an aesthetic contemplation he neither understood nor desired, face to face... with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder."

I'm getting old. That surely has a lot to do with my reaction, but the next thing I felt is what I want to write about. I'm no scientist, a biologist, an anthropologist, an experimental psychologist, or a paleontologist might take me on for my next observation. But here it is—we late-arriving humans are the only creatures who can feel a sense of wonder for the beauty of our world. Other animals can't. If they notice a full moon or it lightening the dark earth, their behavior is determined by their genes over which they have no control.

Earlier that day, I watched two male robins fighting together under the Norway pine just off my deck trying to attract and hold the attention of a single drab female that was on the ground a few feet away. I thought their behavior was exciting and beautiful. They were just doing what their genes made them do to reproduce. Also that day, I watched a tree sparrow on the deck rail, where I later stood to take my pee, puffing up its neck feathers to look like a pearl necklace which made it seem twice its size. It too was hoping to attract a mate so it could reproduce.

Hundreds or maybe thousands of National Geographic films I've seen have shown me that this kind of behavior comes from primitive life forces that are entirely instinctual. Sometimes, as the

robins and the tree sparrow did, they show an almost fierce desire to recreate themselves; sometimes other animals form packs for self-protection or, at best, to protect their young from predation and sometimes, as countless specials have shown, they seem to sometimes show a sense of affection or maybe even what we call love, but none of these behaviors is anything like our singular ability to feel a sense of wonder.

My realization of what we alone understand about the natural world was shown in a more multifaceted way in another television program I've been watching called, "Australia: First Four Billion Years."

Life began on this planet around four billion years ago: Human life, "hominin types" we're called, about seven million years ago and *Homo sapiens* (that's us) about three hundred and fifty thousand years ago. No one yet knows the whys or anything really close to the exact whens—"give or take a billion years or so" or "maybe it was 370 million years, not 350 million" a scientist might say.

I know it is not politically correct to say this next thing, but can there ever be a way science and religion can truly reconcile? Is there any reason why Christians or other religious believers shouldn't find the scientist's work discovering the origins of life and human intelligent life alarming and frightening? The Old Testament's thirteen hundred year old earth is a lot easier to visualize than a four billion year old one. And what is there to say about all the death. Heaven's a lot more credible with the thirteen hundred year old model than a four billion year one; and how many countable generations was it in the Old Testament that went back to the creation? A finite number, right? Try that on a three hundred and fifty million year old model.

Recognizing that life is billions of years old and that the life of our species is hundreds of millions of years old makes me view both life and death differently than I once did. We are the only creatures who understand the meaning of both life and death; we are the only creatures who understand the purpose of and necessity for both. We are the only creatures who recognize that we will only live for a flicker of time in the life of our planet now that scientists have begun to reveal to us the real story of life on earth. Is there any wonder then that in the Garden of Eden story, knowledge was given to us by a serpent and it was considered a curse?

On the other side, because of our knowledge only we humans, who have spent and will spend such precious little bits of time on this earth, have been able to feel the wonder of it all and appreciate the value of the little time we have to enjoy it. Because only we know we are going to die. That's the curse that makes us different from all the billions of species that have come and gone on this planet or share it with us today. Ninety nine point nine percent of life on our planet, scientists tell us, is now extinct.

Enough of this you say. You're depressing the hell out of me.

I know it. We don't want to look at death in this way. We've invented heaven and other forms of afterlife. We talk about rebirth and reincarnation. We talk about the cycle of life to help us stop thinking about the reality of our oh-so-short lifetimes.

Andrew Marvell got to the crux of the matter in "To His Coy Mistress," presenting a theme as well as it has ever been done that we now call "carpe diem." Live for today, the poem argues, for tomorrow we may die. The poem's first lines read: "Had we but world enough and time, / This coyness, lady, were [would be] no crime." He imagines loving and wooing her for as long as there has been human life itself, but then, referring to her unwillingness to love him in return, he says "But at my back I always hear / Time's winged chariot hurrying near." Death will turn his lust into ashes because, "The grave's a fine and private place, / But none I think do there embrace."

With this curse of knowledge, unavoidable and undeniable, what are we to do? Plod on, I guess, and live for today, each day, without ignoring the realities that science shows us.

Even more humbling is the reality that we've only known for a flicker of time about the universe itself. Could a god have created all this billions and billions of years ago? Remember Carl Sagan's famous, "There are a billion stars in the Milky Way galaxy and a billion galaxies." And Sagan, we know, since we now have telescopes in space, was far off the actual numbers, maybe hundreds of billions of times off!

Yes, plod on, live for today, accept the fact that curse or not, we know these things; yet appreciate that we alone can feel the sense of wonder I felt standing on my deck, taking a pee into my own back yard. Fitzgerald captured that as he imagined the Dutch sailor's vision of this new place that they were only beginning to explore. That's what I felt: my own, our own, distinct place in our universe.

Yes, it is our universe, isn't it? It belongs to us, doesn't it, because we alone can comprehend its beauty and its vastness. But damn its vastness, and damn the possibility of other life forms on distant planets that might share with us the sense of wonder our knowledge has given us. Say we discover someday that we are not alone, that other life forms exist outside our solar system. What difference can that ever really make in the split second of time of our existence? That split second of time we all have to relish our own uniqueness which we, like the robin and the sparrow, must also pass on to those who will follow us. It is a gift and a curse only to us, yet, to return to the end of Gatsby, "that's no matter—tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther....And the one fine morning—"

Myths

Charles Kerlin

Myths we are told are true!

Tim's Core handout has ours myths on green paper,
Asian myths are on salmon, and Africans are goldenrod.

I want to be salmon

I want water myths, stream myths,
Not a bunch of old gods and goddesses
Playing with egg shells.

I want salmon going up stream
For family reunions,
Back there for a last time,
Spewing their sperm and eggs into the water.

The story of Tiamet is a river story
But the Tigres and Euphrates
Begin in Tiamet's pierced eyes and totally muck up
The beauty of what could be a stream myth,
So it's disqualified.

The Asian myths on salmon are sadly disappointing,
Garish stories in orange and purple—Bollywood!
And the names are unpronounceable!
It's true that they start in an ocean,
But it's full of Lords and Lotuses,
Brahmins and Vishnus.
There are no fish there, no salmon,
Reflecting, I guess, the overpopulation of this place
And their annoying habit of floating dead bodies down the Ganges.

The Pangu from China sounds more interesting,
Like something to eat,
Chinese dim sum,
One with a fish course surely!

Africa on goldenrod seemed promising,
Cornmeal to make hush puppies and fried catfish.
Closer, but not satisfying to a true fisherman—
A trout or salmon man in a clear stream—
Where no dirt-eating catfish could live.

So I'm left with green, Genesis.
Adam and Eve and apples
And the reality of this thing called evil
Which represents Temptation.

(I'd rather eat walleye!
Now there's a real temptation!)

Emerson or Thoreau wouldn't have approved
Because, after all, they were both water men,
Salmon men,
Walden men,
Fishing at night the philosopher and the hermit
In that magic pond where the sky
And the water seemed the same.
No evil there. Just a limit of fish.

Ryan Postma, *Pot for Jay*
Stoneware & Black Slip,
15h x 12w x 9d



Broken Cage

Josh D. Alengo

“How many more bruises will you color yourself with before you finally treat each other with respect?” bickered Kelly Forston. Sharp sequential tugs and yanks on her misbehaving son’s ear was the most effective way she had found to herd him into whatever kennel she found fit for the little hooligan. On this particular occasion, the fenced back yard would suffice.

“This gate will be locked and I’m taking the key with me. If these fights keep breaking out between you and these children you meet in the neighborhood, this is where you’ll spend the rest of your summer while I try to get some work done in the house.” She disappeared inside the house following the slam of the backdoor.

Without the hounding of his mother, Evan’s thoughts returned to the state of his friend, Jonathan Belden. Of the seemingly vast crowds of children that lived within biking distance, Jon was Evan’s only friend. Jon had said so himself, an important point, to Evan. He had proclaimed himself friend of many before, but had since the first utterance has had little but rejection in reply. Jon had voluntarily admitted that Evan was his friend, though, and that meant the world. Peering around the backyard, Evan let his mind slow and his nerves rest after being so frustratingly aroused only minutes before. Losing himself in yet another fit of rage, he had pummeled Brock Corduroy from three blocks away, just behind the corner store in a neighboring subdivision. Brock was just so tall and intimidating, and he wouldn’t shut his big mouth. Every day in school leading up to Evan’s summertime freedom was riddled with torment from people like Brock. Brock and his kind were of the breed that fed on the negative emotions of others, drawing strength from their prey’s dissolving psyche. What Brock did not understand was the concept that kept the small creatures of nature safe. Hundreds of caterpillars are born with poisonous projectiles or spines to keep them safe from sky-diving birds. Boneless, weaponless octopi eject a cloud of dark ink to allow for getaway. Even common housecats have claws. Never in a million years did Brock consider his own small prey more trouble than it was worth, and therein, laid his critical mistake.

To be fair to poor Brock, Evan had restrained himself all year. It could be said without exaggeration that Brock’s torment was nothing short of relentless. Evan was too quiet. He looked too innocent. He was an easy target, a fawn with a limp. Greasy auburn hair that only got redder as he grew, pale complexion, rounded features, and his signature “baby face” all painted a ring target on Evan. Brock had chosen other targets on occasion, but most children put up far more resistance, even fought back. For the entire school year, Evan had hardly said a word to his classmates, especially Brock.

Evan had, on several occasions throughout the year, decided he would probably attack

himself, too, if he were in Brock's position. Quiet and pensive were his defining attributes. They were what he was known for; they shaped his personality and character. He was an observer, an analyst, a thinker, and tactful and self-aware enough to know how easy a target he was because of it. However, with Jon as his witness, Evan would not continue to suffer the torment of the past year.

Earlier that day, he and Jon had discussed the situation:

They were eating lunch in the cafeteria as they had every day, the only two at the table with enough seats for twenty. Evan had at one time felt bad that Jon was as ostracized as he was, but Jon knew the risks of associating himself with a child like Evan. It was sacrifices like these that made Jon not only Evan's only friend, but his best friend. They sat beside each other, eating in silence, save for the uproar of the rest of their sixth grade class enjoying temporary scholarly reprieve.

"We have to come up with a plan for the summer, or Brock will make us miserable," Jon suddenly said.

"Like what?"

"Well, we have to make a hideout, somewhere Brock wouldn't even think to look. We could spend the whole summer there, and a fort would be really cool."

Evan's eyes twinkled with excitement. "You know, a fort does sound like a good idea. We can put a huge lock on the door and make trapdoors and sealable windows!"

"See?" Jon agreed, "we'd have an amazing headquarters, and that big oaf won't have anything to do all summer!"

A heavy hand plopped its weight down on Evan and Jon's adjacent shoulders. Evan's heart skipped a beat as it shifted into higher gear and forced the blood through his body with a shiver and a head rush. Jon's stare deadened and his gaze did not shift from its head-on stare. He gulped. "Who are you two talkin' about? An oaf? You must be talkin' 'bout Adrian Wheeler! That kid's big as a horse!" Brock Jones' sarcasm crept from between his smiling teeth like a cobra preparing to lunge, "Did you pick a spot for our fort, yet?"

Evan's heart sank. Brock must've heard their entire conversation. He gulped hard and his face flushed as Brock broke into cackles, nasally and breathy. His sweaty hand lifted from Jon's shoulder, but not Evan's. With an obnoxious shake, Brock overpowered his tensed muscles, struggling to hold him in his sitting position, trying not to let Brock simply have his way. Evan felt a wretched demon gnash at his mind from deep within. But, just as in every instance before it since the ending of last year's summer, the resistance didn't last long or stop much. Now loosened and flailing slightly, Evan hadn't the courage, or motivation, perhaps, to stop Brock from first spitting into Evan's soup he had intended to eat, then slamming his face into the Styrofoam bowl. Evan clenched his fists and shoved the demon downward, back into its box in the back of his mind. The beast would have him break his promise to his mother, and Evan wouldn't allow it to happen. He

simply picked up his head, took a deep breath, and hoped Brock was done.

There were no supervisors present in the cafeteria to stop him besides the lunch ladies that took no notice to any of the goings on within the place. With a chuckle, Brock slapped his hands together, as though dusting them off, and strutted away, but not before telling them he would, “meet you two at harbor café on your way home!”

The harbor café was owned by the same man that owned the small shipyard and run by his wife, right where the highway curved closest to the water, and on Evan and Jon’s route home. Evan loved the shipyard overlooking Lake Michigan, and since he was allowed to walk home, he had taken it upon himself to explore every nook and cranny of the place while avoiding the three boat mechanics that did lazy hours there throughout the warm seasons. It was such a shame to him, then, that Brock had to pick this place to finally unveil his end-of-the-year surprise to them both, with no adult supervision, and no other children that chose to walk so far. Most children living so far down the highway took the bus, besides Evan and Jon, of course. Evan thought it noteworthy that Brock had to walk the extra miles from either his house or the school in order to meet them there, and his reasoning for the location was puzzling.

The two rounded the last bend before the sails and docks were visible over the roof of the workshop where the boats were repaired and maintained mechanically. The lake obviously lay in lower lands and the highway dipped into a small valley between two larger hills in the landscape, so the visibility of the docks was only granted to those standing on the top of either hillcrest facing down the valley. The roof rose over the menagerie of sailing vessels as the two of them descended the first hill to cross what seemed now to be the valley of death.

Kelly had found out about the schoolyard bully very early in the year, when Evan’s patience with the new student was only just beginning to whittle away as Brock’s attitude became more prevalent. Evan had come home with a bruised collarbone from school the second week of the year when Kelly finally said something, “Honey, he’s a new student. You have to give him a chance, he surely has a kind side to him. He is probably as nervous as you are on your way to school every day and just wants some friends.”

“But, Mom, he has friends, and they help him pick on me.”

“They are probably dealing with some bigger home issues right now, Evan. They need each other and they may need you,” she said sincerely.

“That’s dumb, Mom. And I don’t care what’s wrong at their homes, I just want them to leave me alone.”

“Evan, sweetheart, you need to show compassion. If you are kind, others will be kind to you in return. It’s called paying it forward.”

“Paying it forward? That doesn’t make any sense.”

“Sure it does. It’s like the opposite of paying someone back.”

“What does money have to do with this?!”

“No, I mean payback, revenge. Instead of returning hate with hate, you should try offering love, in hopes of getting love in return. That’s paying it forward.”

“But I don’t love them! They hurt me! I hate them!”

“EVSLAAM FORSTON!” Hearing his full name made Evan cringe as Kelly belted her voice throughout the kitchen and their home’s halls. Time seemed to stop and all Evan’s attention was in her palm, his focus unwavering in the face of her demands for respect. “YOU DO NOT HATE ANYBODY!” she screamed with the same volume. Evan’s blood raced through his veins and his head buzzed with panic and guilt for bringing his mother to such ferocity.

She was panting and a vein throbbed near her temple and she finally lowered her voice, clearly suppressing some unchainable rage within her and speaking as sternly as he’d ever heard words spoken: “Hatred implies the wish for harm upon someone else. You cannot hate this child, Evslaam.

“I want you to think about the world and all its people. There are more than seven billion of us on this planet, people say. Seven billion, Evslaam. A billion is almost unimaginable, but there are seven billions of humans on this one planet. Now think about your life. Think about everything you feel and do everyday, all the thoughts you have and the problems you face. Now you have to put the ideas together, and realize that for every problem you face, there are at least six point nine, nine, nine billion other people facing a new one too. Each of them has a story to tell and a life to live, just like you do. If each of us reacts with hatred to the things that happen that hurt us, then things like war happen. Things like famine and poverty and drought. Things like disease and killing and stealing. So far you have remained the better person than Brock because he has no reason to hate you. If you hate him then he suddenly has a reason and you are no better than he. Do you understand, Evslaam?”

Cringing each time she uttered his full name, Evan gulped down hard and nodded to her, “I understand.”

“I know it is hard, but you have to show them kindness. And even after that, it is likely they’ll hurt you again. However, you cannot hurt them back, no matter what happens, for as long as he is your classmate!” She drilled into Evan’s soul with her glossy stare. His heartbeat was all he could hear besides her voice.

With a quick spin on her heels, she left Evan alone in the kitchen, just his heartbeat and the hum of the ventilation throughout the house.

Now Evan made his way past the harbor with Jon at his side, hoping and praying to avoid a confrontation with Brock, who was still nowhere to be seen.

Evan didn't even want to go home, though. He wished to high heaven that he could stop and spend some time on the docks. He had a few cabinets and drawers in the mechanic's shops where he was sure to score some spare change, which he invariably used to purchase bread to feed the seagulls by the water. Waiting at home was nothing of the sort. At home he would return to a typical Thursday night and the aftermath of his father's short day at work every Wednesday.

The previous night was the first night in weeks that Evan had seen his father. Edward Forston worked as some sort of financial advisor to a bank and Evan's knowledge of the man's position or responsibilities went no further. Evan knew only that his father was responsible for the food he ate and the bed he slept in, so he feigned respect for the mysteriously busy man who spent nearly sixteen hours a day in his office uptown anyway. Wednesdays were the days when Ed would come home at about seven in the evening and get very, very drunk. He'd return from the office for the one day his family was able to see him during the daytime hours, and he'd arrive with a pint of vodka and a bottle of red wine. He'd go on drunken rampages all night each Wednesday, leaving Kelly a depressed and moody wreck for Evan to arrive home to on Thursday.

Every Wednesday night went similarly, almost following a script or formula. Evan would get home to his mother preparing the house yet again for Ed. Without offering to help, Evan would go out and find Jon and they'd play until it got dark, then he'd come home to his comatose father and emotionally distraught mother. He didn't care for the violent few hours of opportunity he had to bond with his father every week. The fighting was usually over with by the time the sun was down, so it worked out well. This particular week's fight must have been a doozy, though, because it was still revving up to speed when Evan walked through the door. He closed the door silently and crept slowly into a spot he could eavesdrop from.

"Ah, blow it out yer ass, Kelly. I work all week and I deserve my few relaxing hours alone! Just let me watch the tournament, please," Ed said in his scruffy and cigarette-charred voice. "I just want to spend some time with my husband! We appreciate every penny you bring in and every bit of food you feed us, but you can hardly tell we're even married, Ed!" Kelly was breaking into tears.

"The boy'll be out of school after tomorrow, so don't get your panties in a knot. You'll have all summer to talk to and spend time with him."

"I love our son, Ed, but you can't be serious! I will spend as much time as I like with Evan, as you say, because he gives me the time of day! I didn't even marry him!"

"He sucked yer tits for a year and you wiped his ass for two more after that. He'd better give you the time of day! Hell, I don't even get to suck yer tits anymore, so he's two steps ahead of me!" Shivering and speechless, Kelly stared at the floor, eyes welling up with tears.

"Just leave me alone unless you wanna start serving me drinks in the nude! Then we could spend some 'quality time' together! Bahaha!" Ed hacked through a fit of smoker's cough before

he could finish his cackle. Evan gulped and felt as though his stomach wanted to burst from his abdomen.

Kelly balled her fists and the vein in her head throbbed. She was fighting something down, shivering and straining with her fists at her sides. She seemed as though she were pushing something down that wanted very badly to rise, to burst upward with all its being. A bead of sweat rolled down her cheek past squinted-shut eyes and pursed lips. The shivering grew violent and her eyes snapped open and, peering around a corner like a mouse, Evan saw a kind of shiny fire in her eyes that wrote volumes of palpable liberation and unbound energy.

Kelly took the three steps forward that separated her from her husband's side in his reclining easy-chair. She lifted her right hand and pulled it back behind her, fingers together and palm flat and rigid. Ed paid no mind and likely did not even notice her in the dark room lit only by the television, showing images of golfers that seemed to only want to line up shots, never to take them. The fire burning in Kelly's eyes shone bright with passion and Evan could taste her rage. Going against her own advice to never lay a hand on an enemy, she tensed the muscles in her chest, core, and shoulder as the veins leading up to her wrist and over her hand throbbed with searing blood. She began to pant and finally caught Ed's attention, just in time for his cheek to meet her open palm and stiff knuckles.

"Kel—" CRACK!

Panting over her prey for a moment, Kelly took a deep breath. Whatever has been unchained within had gotten its fix and was now calming down, as she did as she regained control of the beast and shoved it back downward where it belonged. When she snapped back to reality in mere moments, she turned around to leave the room.

Before she could take three steps, Edward was on his feet in a men's tank-undershirt and boxer shorts. Evan learned very quickly why the variety of the shirt was more commonly referred to as a "wife beater" that night. He watched frozen in horror as his father wailed on his mother, punching and squeezing and throwing and pushing.

Evan panicked. He fled to his bedroom and out of sight and listened vaguely as his father broke furniture and dishes smacking Kelly around the house just beneath him in his comfortable bed. With eyes full of tears, his mind retreated into sleep.

Just as he promised at lunchtime earlier, Brock stepped out of the thin wooded area beside the road just past the harbor's parking lot adjacent the highway. Brock was smiling and he cracked his knuckles. His usual dopey posse was nowhere in sight, but he seemed confident nonetheless. Just like with every other confrontation they had had, Jon backed off, expression stern, silently. Evan normally stepped back as well, but not today.

As Brock stepped forward, the pebbles and gravel crunched beneath his sneakers and a lone

As Brock stepped forward, the pebbles and gravel crunched beneath his sneakers and a lone car zipped by on the highway bend, blowing their hair about. Jon simply observed as Evan remained still and Brock approached him, "There's no more teachers to worry about for the whole summer, buddy," Brock sneered, "so we can have all the summertime fun we can fit into the day for the next three months. It's the delightful quarter of a year where we are temporarily no longer classmates!" Evan's stomach lurched inside him. He recalled Kelly's words and his promise to her. "...However, you cannot hurt him back, no matter what happens, for as long as he is your classmate!" As the line replayed in his mother's voice over and over and over again in his mind, the guilt of betraying his promise to her felt...lighter. His obligation to his mother to leave the tyrant before him alone was lifting slowly into the sky, weightless. The familiar wretched demon snarled and tore at its bindings that Evan worked so hard to restrain it with. His mind felt fuzzy and his blood boiled. The demon's chains were crafted from the strongest discipline-alloy his mind could muster, tempered in the white-hot flame of his respect for his mother and devotion to keeping the promise that seemed so important to her, then coated in a shiny layer of guilt. The demon didn't care about any of that. Evan shivered as his conscious grip wavered.

Brock shoved his chest up against Evan, pushing him back. Evan was lost somewhere in the back of his mind and Jon was scared stiff. Evan's stare was lost and unfocused and he was hardly able to stand up straight and regain his balance. His smoky gaze was clouded with an internal struggle; a decision trying to be made. He straightened out his knees, but Brock was having a blast simply toying with him.

Rebellious and thinking only of itself, the bound demon of rage simmered up to a boil deep within Evan. He squinted and gritted his teeth as the rushing blood made him more jittery and distraught. A wicked and clawed abomination ripped and snarled and tore and rended its way up, and Evan's mental bindings were shattering in a lack of constitution.

"So where are we gonna' build this fort, Forston?!" Brock mightily pushed Evan back and right off his feet. He skid a foot or two in the gravel then sat back up, eyes squinted and baring his teeth the entire time. Sentient thoughts faded into nothingness as the argument his mind attempted to have with itself came to a forced conclusion.

A bead of sweat rolled down his cheek and plopped down into the dust and stones. A monster of uncontrollable fury roared in a feral rampage as it leapt up the stairs of the mind into the realm of Evan Forston's conscious thought.

He kept squinting as he pushed himself up and as his legs straightened out, his shivering died down. Once upright, his eyes snapped open and he met Brock's intimidating stare of the hunter with a glossy and fiery glare. The demon-beast ran wild among his thoughts, tearing its way through every graceful movement and idea. Strings of ideas that flowed like rivers and streams of thought

were now jagged and cluttered. His database-like memory fogged over like a murky quagmire. His car zipped by on the highway bend, blowing their hair about. Jon simply observed as Evan remained still and Brock approached him, "There's no more teachers to worry about for the whole summer, buddy," Brock sneered, "so we can have all the summertime fun we can fit into the day for the next three months. It's the delightful quarter of a year where we are temporarily no longer classmates!" Evan's stomach lurched inside him. He recalled Kelly's words and his promise to her. "...However, you cannot hurt him back, no matter what happens, for as long as he is your classmate!" As the line replayed in his mother's voice over and over and over again in his mind, the guilt of betraying his promise to her felt...lighter. His obligation to his mother to leave the tyrant before him alone was lifting slowly into the sky, weightless. The familiar wretched demon snarled and tore at its bindings that Evan worked so hard to restrain it with. His mind felt fuzzy and his blood boiled. The demon's chains were crafted from the strongest discipline-alloy his mind could muster, tempered in the white-hot flame of his respect for his mother and devotion to keeping the promise that seemed so important to her, then coated in a shiny layer of guilt. The demon didn't care about any of that. Evan shivered as his conscious grip wavered.

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Brock leaned to shove him once more, but Evan sidestepped and used the weight and momentum to shove Brock face-first to the ground. He then grabbed Brock's collar and inhuman strength flooded into his muscles. The white-hot rage fueled his adrenaline rush, and Evan heaved Brock up as high as his own chest. Evan lifted his right leg and stomped down his foot, pulling Brock downward and back to the ground once more, face-first again. Evan flipped him over onto his back, revealing the bloodstain in the gravel in the shape of Brock's head. Loosely lodged pebbles dropped from Brock's face as he struggled to open his mouth to pant.

Evan bent back down and pulled Brock by the collar to his knees. His bloody and pathetic face wanted to ask for mercy, but his cracked jaw pained him too much to speak. Evan brought his face close to Brock's, seething with hatred for the plump bully, "If you ask me once more about where we're putting our fort, THE NEW LOCATION WILL BE UP YOUR ASS!" Spitting the last line into Brock's bleeding face, Evan pulled his arm back once more, knuckles cracking and muscles tensing as he clenched his stiff fist. Jon finally managed to utter,

"...Evslaam..." CRACK!

Panting and shivering again, Evan's subconscious slammed the cage door behind that treacherous demon. His eyes fogged up a bit, and he was suddenly very tired, "I'm going home, Jon."

Jon had been trying to regain composure and make a decision throughout the whole affair, but now that it was apparently over, his mind finally decided it was ready to function again.
"Evan...I...How will Brock get home?"

The boy was laying on his back, unconscious on the side of the highway. Cars still zoomed by and waves lapped against the docks in the harbor. A slight breeze wafted through the air, smelling of lake water and exhaust. "Goodnight, Jon." Evan disappeared beneath the orange horizon as he crested the second hill and making his turn to the left toward the lake, to his home, and where Jon would have to continue straight in order to get home. And just like that, Jon was alone with the unconscious bully.

Jon sighed and wiped the sweat from his brow before leaving the passed out classmate to fend for himself, and headed on up the hill back home.

COVER ART BY *Amanda Duncan*

